

JESUS CHRIST  
PRIEST & VICTIM

PÈRE S. M. GIRAUD

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Jesus Christ Priest  
and Victim

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JESUS CHRIST  
PRIEST AND VICTIM

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# JESUS CHRIST PRIEST AND VICTIM

BY

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"THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE AND THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE IN  
THE RELIGIOUS STATE"

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TO

MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD  
AND OUR MOTHER

“ Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.”

52

## PREFACE

THE Meditations in this book deal with the Incarnation, the Holy Childhood, and the Hidden Life of our divine Lord. They form the first two portions of the first of a projected series of three volumes of Meditations upon the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ considered as Priest and Victim. The author only lived to publish two volumes out of the three; and even in these some of the Meditations on the Public Life of our Lord were left incomplete. In a second edition the author had hoped to prune away certain repetitions, but he died before he was able to effect a revision. In the translation a little has been done in the way of suppressing redundancies, otherwise no change has been made. Should the present collection of Meditations meet with appreciation, a second volume dealing with the mysteries of the Public Life of our Lord will be issued.

The Meditations originated in some quarterly

papers written for members of an Association for the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at Grenoble. They were therefore intended for devout readers generally, though the author suggests that they may be specially useful for religious communities. He observes that each chapter is meant to be sufficiently long to make an adequate portion for Spiritual Reading, but that each separate point or consideration—there are three in each Meditation—provides enough matter for an exercise of Mental Prayer.

W. H. M.

*June, 1913.*

## CONTENTS

	<small>PAGE</small>
PREFACE	v
INTRODUCTION	xv
I. THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION	1
i. How it came about	1
ii. The Excellence of the Mystery	4
iii. The Purpose of the Mystery	5
II. AT THE MOMENT OF THE INCARNATION JESUS CHRIST IS MADE A PRIEST FOR EVER	8
i. It is of Faith that Jesus Christ is a Priest	8
ii. At the First Moment of the Incarnation Jesus Christ became a Priest	11
iii. Jesus Christ a Priest for ever	13
III. JESUS CHRIST, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST, MADE A TRUE ACT OF PRIESTHOOD, WHICH IS SACRI- FICE, WHEN HE OFFERED HIMSELF AT THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS INCARNATION	16
i. The proper Office of a Priest is Sacrifice	16
ii. Our Lord exercises His Priesthood by the Oblation of Himself from the Moment of His Incarnation	18
iii. From the Moment of the Incarnation the Sacrifice of our Lord has all its own special Perfection	21

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
IV. OUR DIVINE VICTIM'S ADORATION AND HUMILIA- TIONS IN HIS INCARNATION - - - - -	24
i. The Cause of Jesus Christ's Humilia- tions - - - - -	24
ii. The Depth of His Humiliations - - - - -	26
iii. Our Participation in His Humiliations - - - - -	29
V. OUR ADORABLE VICTIM'S THANKSGIVING - - - - -	32
i. The Necessity and Excellence of Thanksgiving - - - - -	32
ii. How Jesus is Himself bound to this Duty - - - - -	34
iii. How our Lord fulfils the Duty of Thanksgiving - - - - -	36
VI. OUR DIVINE VICTIM'S PRAYER OF SUPPLICA- TION AT THE FIRST MOMENT OF THE INCAR- NATION - - - - -	40
i. The Beauty of our Lord's Prayer in Mary's Womb - - - - -	40
ii. The End of our Victim's Prayer - - - - -	43
iii. Our Prayers owe all their Efficacy to Jesus Christ's Prayer - - - - -	47
VII. OUR ADORABLE VICTIM'S EXPIATION FROM THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS INCARNATION - - - - -	50
i. Expiation is the most salient Note of our Lord's Sacrifice - - - - -	50
ii. From His Mother's Womb our Lord is a Victim of Expiation - - - - -	53
iii. How to Unite with the Dispositions of our Lord as a Victim of Expiation - - - - -	56

## CONTENTS

ix

	<small>PAGE</small>
<b>VIII. OUR ADORABLE VICTIM'S LOVE FOR THE WILL OF HIS FATHER FROM THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS INCARNATION</b>	60
i. Our Lord Himself teaches us that He is entirely a Victim of His Father's Will	60
ii. Our Lord's Dispositions towards His Father's Will	64
iii. On the perfect Way in which Jesus fulfils His Father's Will	67
<b>IX. THE UNION OF MARY WITH JESUS IN THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION</b>	71
i. On the Mother of God	71
ii. Mary is fully aware of what was taking place in her Virginal Womb during the Nine Months she was bearing Jesus, our Victim	75
iii. Jesus, our divine Victim, constantly draws His Holy Mother to Himself, and makes her participate in His own Dispositions and in His State of being the sacrificial Victim of His Father for the sake of Mankind	79
<b>X. THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY</b>	83
i. Mary's Departure for Elizabeth's House. — The Visitation is a Mystery of Immolation	83
ii. Mary's Arrival at Elizabeth's House. — Jesus begins to reveal His Mother as the Dispenser of all His Graces	87

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
iii. Mary's Sojourn with Elizabeth.—The Virtues she exercises during this Visit - - - - -	93
<b>XI. THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST -</b>	<b>99</b>
i. The Moment of Jesus' Birth - - - - -	99
ii. Jesus' Crib is an Altar.—How He therein shows Himself as Priest and Victim - - - - -	102
iii. Jesus, in His Crib-Altar, is mainly a Victim of Expiation - - - - -	105
<b>XII. THE POVERTY OF THE HOLY CHILD -</b>	<b>111</b>
i. The Cause and Motive of the Poverty of the Divine Infant in the Manger at Bethlehem - - - - -	111
ii. The Marks of Poverty in the Holy Child in the Manger at Bethle- hem - - - - -	115
iii. Our Duty as to the Poverty of the Holy Child Jesus - - - - -	119
<b>XIII. SOME SPECIAL CONDITIONS OF OUR DIVINE VICTIM AT BETHLEHEM -</b>	<b>125</b>
i. The State of Littleness in the Holy Child - - - - -	125
ii. The State of Dependence in the Holy Child - - - - -	129
iii. The State of Helplessness of the Holy Child - - - - -	133

	PAGE
<b>XIV. THE MYSTERY OF THE CIRCUMCISION</b>	138
i. This Mystery specially belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ's Life as Victim	138
ii. Our Lord's extreme Humiliation in this Mystery	141
iii. The First Shedding of the Precious Blood in this Mystery	144
<b>XV. THE MYSTERY OF THE EPIPHANY—THE MAGI AS OUR EXAMPLES</b>	149
i. The Magi seek Jesus	149
ii. The Magi find Jesus	154
iii. The Magi worship Jesus as both Priest and Victim	157
<b>XVI. THE RELIGIOUS ON THE DAY OF THEIR HOLY PROFESSION, LIKE THE MAGI, OFFER THEIR DIVINE BRIDEGROOM GOLD, AND FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH</b>	163
i. Gold—the Vow and Virtue of holy Poverty	163
ii. Frankincense—the Vow and the Virtue of Chastity	168
iii. Myrrh—the Vow and the Virtue of Obedience	173
<b>XVII. THE MYSTERY OF THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN</b>	179
i. Mary goes to the Temple to fulfil the Law of Purification	179
ii. Mary goes to the Temple to offer Jesus to His heavenly Father	184

	PAGE
iii. The lovely Spectacle afforded by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the Temple of Jerusalem - - -	189
<b>XVIII. THE MYSTERY OF OUR LORD'S OBLATION OF HIMSELF IN THE TEMPLE - - -</b>	<b>193</b>
i. The Reason of our Lord's external and public Oblation of Himself in the Temple - - -	193
ii. The Dispositions with which Jesus offers Himself to God the Father in the Temple - - -	198
iii. How each one of us is presented in the Temple and made an Oblation when we are Baptized - - -	203
<b>XIX. ON SIMEON'S WORDS TO MARY: "AND THY OWN SOUL A SWORD SHALL PIERCE" - -</b>	<b>208</b>
i. The Greatness of Mary's first Sorrow	208
ii. Mary's Dispositions in this Mystery	214
iii. How we should join in this Mystery of Sorrow - - -	218
<b>XX. THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT - - -</b>	<b>225</b>
i. The general Characteristics of the Mystery - - -	225
ii. The Humiliation of Jesus and Mary's Sorrow in this Mystery - -	229
iii. The Dispositions with which we should take Part in this great Mystery - - -	232

	PAGE
<b>XXI. THE OBEDIENCE OF ST. JOSEPH IN THIS MYSTERY -</b>	<b>239</b>
i. Simplicity, the first Quality of St. Joseph's Obedience	239
ii. Readiness to obey, the second Point in St. Joseph's Obedience	243
iii. Self-sacrifice, the third Point in St. Joseph's Obedience	247
<b>XXII. THE MYSTERY OF JESUS' TWELFTH YEAR</b>	<b>252</b>
i. First: Jesus is separated from Mary and Joseph	252
ii. Secondly: Mary and Joseph look for Jesus	257
iii. Thirdly: Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the Temple	261
<b>XXIII. "AND HE WENT DOWN WITH THEM, AND CAME TO NAZARETH: AND WAS SUBJECT TO THEM"</b>	<b>268</b>
i. "He went down with them"	268
ii. "And He came to Nazareth"	272
iii. "And He was subject to them"	278
<b>XXIV. THREE MARKS OF JESUS' HIDDEN LIFE AT NAZARETH</b>	<b>282</b>
i. A Life of Prayer	282
ii. A Life of Silence	286
iii. A Life of Work	291

	PAGE
<b>XXV. "AND JESUS ADVANCED IN WISDOM AND AGE, AND GRACE WITH GOD AND MEN"</b>	<b>298</b>
i. "Jesus advanced in Wisdom" -	298
ii. "Jesus advanced in Age" -	303
iii. "Jesus advanced in Grace" -	309
<b>XXVI. MARY'S LIFE DURING THE HOLY CHILDHOOD AND THE HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS</b>	<b>316</b>
i. Mary's Devotion to the Contemplation of Jesus - - -	316
ii. Mary is all inflamed and consumed with the Love of Jesus - - -	322
iii. Mary is a faithful Copy of Jesus - - -	329
<b>XXVII. THE UNION OF ST. JOSEPH WITH OUR LORD IN THE MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY CHILDHOOD AND OF THE HIDDEN LIFE—AND HIS HOLY DEATH</b>	<b>334</b>
i. St. Joseph's Union with our Lord in ministering to Him - - -	334
ii. St. Joseph's interior Union with our Lord - - - - -	340
iii. St. Joseph's Death - - - - -	347

## INTRODUCTION

### MEDITATIONS ON THE MYSTERIES OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST CONSIDERED AS PRIEST AND VICTIM

#### I

*The Worship of God consists mainly of  
Sacrifice*

GOD, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is the only perfect Being. He is infinite, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent. He is the Creator of all, the Lord of all, the last End of all.

Therefore all creatures, rational and irrational, are in a state of absolute dependence upon Him, and to this state they must give expression.

Creatures devoid of reason, such as the stars, the mountains, animals, and the vegetable world, are in this state of utter dependence. "Thou hast founded the earth, and it continueth. By Thy ordinance the day goeth on: for all things serve Thee." "The heavens

show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands." But all this praise of inanimate creation is unconscious, and hence its state of dependence upon God, and the praise which it bestows upon Him, are not really a worship worthy of the supreme Lord of all things.

Rational creatures are Angels and men. These privileged beings are the only ones to render God a homage and worship in which He finds His glory.

This homage is of three kinds: Adoration, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

1. *Adoration* is a religious act whereby we acknowledge that God is of infinite excellence and perfection, that He is our first and sole Cause, that is, our Creator; that He is our absolute Lord and Governor; and that He is also necessarily our last End. And therefore we declare our entire dependence upon Him, and that all our acts must be for His honour and glory.

2. *Thanksgiving* is the act whereby we acknowledge that God is the first and sole Cause of all goods without exception, whether of nature or of grace, and we testify to this infinitely good God our entire gratitude in this way.

3. By *Supplication* we declare that the inexhaustible goodness of God is not only the cause of all the blessings we receive, but that it is ever ready, both in this world and in the next, to accord us all the temporal or spiritual blessings we may need.

Such is the homage due from every creature to God, and because God is love, and all His works are love, every rational creature must yield Him the worship owed to Him for so many reasons, in a spirit of perfect charity.

Therefore the Angels from the moment of their first creation, and during their time of trial, had to fulfil, and actually did fulfil, these sacred and essential duties.

Similarly, all men from Adam's day till now are bound thereto.

After the last Judgement there will be no reason to ask anything from God, since all will have been consummated, and therefore supplication will be no longer needed. But then, and throughout eternity, adoration and thanksgiving will be practised by Angels and men incessantly, in the highest charity.

Now, there is one act, perfect beyond all others, which expresses and comprises in a most excellent way the three kinds of homage which we essentially owe to God, and this act

is that of the sacrifice of ourselves. This is the oblation and consecration of all that we have and are to God, to honour and glorify Him as He is in Himself, and in His relations to ourselves, and to obtain from His infinite charity all the blessings we need.

Sacrifice is, therefore, an act essential to every rational creature; and the first use of reason should be an entire and absolute oblation and consecration of itself to the Creator. Nothing is more indisputable than this.

Hence Sacrifice has always existed. It existed in heaven before the fall of the Angels, when the celestial spirits were not yet confirmed in grace, and had to merit by their dispositions of worship and love towards God, admission to the beatific vision. They were true Victims in the presence of His Majesty, entirely immolated to His glory and good pleasure. But, unfortunately, all did not persevere, and those who unhappily gave up the glorious state of sacrifice became evil spirits.

The good Angels were faithful to their happy vocation of being Victims of God. Nothing appeared to them to be so desirable as to be confirmed in their sacrificial state. They resisted all temptation; they persevered in humility, and hence they abide ever in heaven,

offering God the sacrifice of their adoration, praise, and thanksgiving.

And Adam, too, in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall, was in a state of perpetual sacrifice. He offered himself to God, acknowledging Him as his sole First Cause, his absolute Lord, and his last End. As far as he could, he offered all creatures along with himself, and he made this offering as much for the sake of the infinite Being and sovereign Majesty of God as to testify his gratitude for all the blessings received by himself and all creation from the divine bounty. But while acknowledging his own helplessness and need, he fervently besought the Creator to continue to bestow His benefits upon himself and all the world. And thus he was really in God's sight a Victim whose life belonged entirely to Him whom he adored, praised, and loved as his sovereign Good.

But Adam did not long remain faithful. Like the rebellious angels, he revolted against God and offended the Majesty and love of his Creator by his mad pride. Happily, mercy prevailed against justice, and guilty man obtained a promise of forgiveness.

The blessed consequence of this forgiveness was that Adam was able to continue a victim

whose homage the God of infinite mercy was willing to accept. Nevertheless, in order that the rights of eternal Justice should not be disregarded, the divine Wisdom was pleased not to grant forgiveness unconditionally : satisfaction was demanded of man. Hence, in addition to the essential duties owed by man to his Creator, a fresh obligation was laid upon him, the duty of Expiation.

Henceforward sacrifice gains an additional mark : Expiation. Man is no longer only a victim of adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication ; he is also a Victim of Expiation.

Such was his inevitable condition after the fall ; and this condition was founded on the very nature of his perpetual relations with God.

And now we must speak of our adorable and truly unique Victim, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head of all worship of Angels and men. It was in virtue of His grace that the Angels were raised in the beginning to a supernatural state ; and thereby they gave God the worship due unto Him, and became acceptable victims in His sight. By His grace, too, the faithful Angels remained obedient.

Similarly, the first man was only raised from the state of nature to the state of grace by the

merits of Jesus Christ, and such acts of worship as he made to the honour and glory of his Creator only possessed any value through Christ's merits. Man was a victim in Jesus Christ and by Jesus Christ ; and when he obtained forgiveness, and became a victim of expiation, it was through Jesus that he received this mercy, and it is in Him and by Him, that is to say, in virtue of the sacrifice which Jesus was to offer upon the Cross, that his expiatory acts were acceptable to God. On these great truths we shall often have to meditate in considering the mysteries of our divine Redeemer.

## II

*.Jesus Christ is our Priest and Victim*

When the eternal Word became man, then as man He incurred the obligation of being ever in a state of sacrifice in the presence of the divine Majesty of the Father. Apart from His intention of being our Saviour, He would have had to be a Victim ; for being an innocent and perfect man, it is plain that He would have fulfilled all the duties of a creature towards the Creator in the most excellent manner, and consequently, both His inward

and outward life would have been a perpetual Sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

But through love for us, and to obey the will of His Father, He willed to be a Victim of Expiation ; and therefore His Sacrifice in the sight of His Father bore the four marks demanded by God's rights over us : Adoration, Thanksgiving, Supplication, and Expiation.

Thus our Lord was a Victim from the first moment of His conception, as we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews ; and He was a Victim all His life long. In his innermost heart He never ceased to offer Himself as a Victim to the Father. But it was the same with His outward life. Some acts and mysteries express His state of being a Victim in a more telling way ; but in all of them there was the spirit of a Victim, because every one of them was done to the honour and glory of His Father, who is the Goal of all Sacrifice.

Ever a Victim in this world, He continued to be so after ascending into heaven. The faith teaches us that he is our Victim in the Most Holy Sacrament ; and even now in heaven He is in a sacrificial state before His Father, because He continues to be a creature

<sup>1</sup> For this and for what follows, see *Theol. Tolos.*, vol. ii, p. 491 and 559 ; Ed. 12

so far as He is man ; and therefore He cannot cease from offering His Father adoration, praise, and thanksgiving, which are the essential acts of every creature's worship. He will not be eternally a Victim of expiation, since there will be nothing left to expiate after the general Judgement ; nor a Victim of supplication, since there will remain no blessings to pray for, when the elect are in possession of every good ; but He will always be a Victim of adoration and thanksgiving, and we shall all of us, including Mary and also the Angels, be united with His eternal Sacrifice as victims of adoration and thanksgiving.

Jesus is not only essentially and perpetually a Victim, but also a Priest. He was ordained by His Father to the Priesthood from the moment of His conception in Mary's womb. Thus He is a Priest, and performs the office of the priesthood all His life long on earth, as He will fulfil it for ever in heaven, for the offering of an eternal Sacrifice requires an eternal priesthood.

And note that our Lord's Priesthood and Sacrifice are not only the highest of all, but His Priesthood is really the only Priesthood, and His Sacrifice the only sacrifice. The priests of the Old Law are gone, and with them their rites

and ceremonies have disappeared ; and the priests of the New Law are united in and with the sole Priesthood of Jesus Christ, as may be admirably seen in the Sacrifice of the altar, the proper and essential act of Priesthood, in which they do not say of the bread and wine in the prayer of consecration : " This is the Body, This is the Blood of Jesus Christ," but " This is My Body, This is My Blood."

Jesus Incarnate, ever Priest and ever a Victim ! The sole Priest and the sole Victim of God the Father on behalf of Angels and of men, the one centre of the divine love and favour, the one centre of our hope and love in this world, and of our love and of the love of all other beings throughout eternity ! What a grand subject for meditation, wonder, adoration, thankfulness, and love !

### III

#### *The Excellence of the Mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ our Priest and Victim con- sidered as Subjects for Meditation*

In the mysteries of His life our Lord is generally regarded as a Master teaching by word and deed, and this point of view is

perfectly just. In all our Meditations we shall follow Him as our Master and Teacher.

But, in considering our Lord as Priest and Victim, we go as it were to the very source of His teaching. As Priest and Victim He teaches us in the deepest and most illuminating manner what God is, what we are in His sight, what God has done for us, and what we ought to do for Him. Jesus the Priest and Victim is thus the Master *par excellence*. But He does more than teach, He draws souls unto Himself, He makes them victims along with Himself. The end of His Priesthood is, indeed, not only to immolate His natural Body to His Father's glory, but His mystical Body the Church also. We have not only to hearken to His words, we have to enter into His dispositions as a Victim ; and if we are to pray to any real purpose, we must enter in our prayer into union with Him as victims with Him.

This shows the excellence of meditating on the mysteries of Jesus considered as Priest and Victim. How living a faith should accompany such meditation ! What a spirit of worship ! What a holy ardour in trying to enter into the feeling of the Sacred Heart of Jesus ! What an insatiable yearning for union

with our dear and loving Saviour! Thus, by entering into His priestly spirit shall we attain the happiness of being victims worthy of Him and of the Father to whom His Sacrifice is offered through all eternity!

## IV

*How to meditate on the Mysteries of our Lord*

The method here given has nothing new in it; but a summary of what is to be found in many books on mental prayer may be helpful to those who use the Reflections given in this volume as a preparation for the pious practice of meditation.

The method to be used in mental prayer consists of three parts: the Preparation, the Substance of the Prayer, and the Conclusion.

I. *The Preparation*.—First give honour to the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.

1. Put yourself in the presence of God the Father. Make acts of faith, adoration, and humiliation, thinking of His infinite Majesty.

2. Turn to the Son, the Word incarnate, the God of all mercy, ever compassionate towards sinners. Appeal to His pitiful heart: acknowledge your innumerable and perpetual faults of

ingratitude and unfaithfulness : make an act of contrition with all humility and confidence.

3. Ask the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Understanding and Wisdom, to enlighten you as to the mysteries you are about to meditate upon. Acknowledge your ignorance, and the way in which sin and passion and illusions have darkened your mind.

But never end your preparation without having recourse to Mary, the Mistress of mental prayer. She it is who enables souls to enter into the meaning of the mysteries of her divine Son. Did she not ever possess all fulness of knowledge of her beloved Son's heart ? And was she not in the most real way His perfect Victim ?

II. *The Substance of the Prayer.*—This part of mental prayer has to do with what is specially the matter of each meditation. Here one thoroughly goes through the particular subject selected for study : its depths are sounded in the light of faith.

FIRSTLY.—Bring all the powers of your soul to bear on the mystery you are about to meditate upon.

i. Recall all the circumstances, the place, the persons, the things they do, the words they

speak,—in a word, recall as fully as possible the Gospel narrative. See our Lord and His deeds and dispositions in each scene.

ii. Make use of the book if you cannot do without it; but the reading should have been done sufficiently well beforehand to enable you now to dispense with it.

iii. Try, if God will, to be thoroughly engrossed in what is taking place before your mind's eye, so that you think of nothing but Jesus the Victim, exercising His priestly authority over your soul and all its faculties, Jesus with all the heavenly dispositions of His Sacred Heart. And then, under the sway of His grace pay Him all the homage that is His due, making the acts that naturally arise from thinking on the mystery, and dwelling upon the adorable dispositions of our Saviour's soul as revealed therein. These acts are enumerated in the following order by St. Augustine :<sup>1</sup>

1. *Admiration*.—How can any soul enter deeply into the dispositions and feelings of the Heart of Jesus in any mystery, without being filled with admiration, knowing that far beyond all that it has been permitted to explore, there are unfathomable abysses of divine beauty and infinite sanctity ?

<sup>1</sup> *Patrol. Lat.*, XXXIX, 2132.

2. *Congratulation*.—By this act we testify to our Lord the joy we feel in finding Him to be so wonderful and perfect, so far beyond any conception of man or Angel, such an entire Victim to the Father, fulfilling all that increases the glory of Him who is the salvation of our souls.

3. *Love*.—Love that sets the Beloved above all, suffering no comparison with Him ; love with no reservations, seeking in all things to please the Beloved ; love that tends towards the most intimate and entire and absolute union with the Beloved.

4. *Praise*.—This is the outpouring of love ; it is love setting its victim on fire, and thereby making it rise heavenwards as the sweet perfume of burning incense. The loving victim is all praise, and wants all creatures to unite with it in praising and glorifying the Beloved.

5. *Adoration*.—But the victim of love never forgets its nothingness, and if it ascend by praise, it abases itself by humility. The sweet Jesus who so deeply abases Himself in each mystery is the God, and will be the Judge, of the soul. Hence the soul adores, recognizing its absolute dependence, and desiring never to forget that He, in His deepest humiliation as a Victim, is all, whereas the soul, despite its

transports of love and its sense of being called to divine union, is really altogether nothingness.

6. *Thanksgiving.*—How many are our reasons for thanksgiving ! This would be the case were there no other than that of being at the feet of Jesus, busied like Mary in the house of Lazarus with beholding and hearkening to Him, contemplating Him in the depths of His mysteries. Yet how many others there are ! Is not an ocean of divine mercies poured forth over all our unfathomable miseries ?

SECONDLY.—We have now to apply to ourselves what we have learnt in meditation. For this purpose there are three things to be done.

1. Let us be *convinced* that the dispositions and feelings of the heart of Jesus, which we have been adoring in the mystery under consideration, ought to be our own. This conviction must be strong and deep. To secure such a conviction let us bear in mind that as Christians we are members of Jesus Christ, and that we ought to live by His life ; we ought to have the same feelings and thoughts as Jesus : so we are warned by St. Paul. A Christian should be another Christ. We shall never be saved

unless we bear His likeness in us in the sight of God.

(If we are fortunate enough to be consecrated to God by vows, especially if we happen to be priests, what special motives bind us to live by the life of Jesus Christ, to have His mind in us in all things, and to show outwardly in our conduct a supernatural resemblance to Him.)

2. Let us make a *serious examination* of our conscience, feelings, works, and of our whole outward and inward life, comparing ourselves with the pattern of Jesus Christ shown in the mystery upon which we are meditating.

Such a comparison will fill us with confusion, and lead us to make several acts of humility, contrition, and firm purpose. Let us go to the very bottom of our souls, and make an earnest effort to discover its needs. Let us ascertain the cause of our unfaithfulness and inconstancy, of our apparently irremediable lukewarmness after all the graces we have received ; and, as light is granted to us, let us renew our acts of shame and contrition with a generous and resolute desire to do better in future.

3. *Pray with confidence.*—And just when we are covered with confusion at the thought of our unutterable wretchedness and of our inability to follow Jesus in the way of sacrifice,

let us cast ourselves at His feet and beg Him to work in us by the power and spirit of His Priesthood what we could never do of ourselves. May the fire of His Sacrifice destroy all our defilements, the sword of His immolation cut away from us all the fatal attachments that bind us to the world and its vanities, and especially to ourselves !

That our prayer may not fail in its effects, let us call in the aid of the intercession and the merits of the merciful Mother, our Blessed Lady, the Victim of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let us also invoke the Angels and the Saints.

THIRDLY.—Now is the time to make fervent resolutions. This point is so important that were it omitted the whole of our prayer might be of no avail for the sanctification of the soul.

There are three kinds of resolutions :

1. *General resolutions.* These are the first to come into the mind after a time of serious meditation. They are usually something like this : “ Now it is settled ! I am wholly God’s, I will give myself up to His grace and goodwill without any reservation. I will break off my miserable behaviour, which is losing me

the hope of heaven, and incurring reprobation for the last Judgement ! O Jesus ! Like Thee, I desire to be a victim entirely immolated to the glory and the will of Thy Father." Such resolutions are good to make, and they should be taken with love and fervour, but they are not enough.

2. *Particular resolutions.* These tend directly to destroy what is wrong in us ; they attack our dominant defect ; their end is the practice of the virtues belonging to our duties in our calling : humility, gentleness, patience, simplicity, zeal, generosity, perfect charity.

As a rule, our resolutions should be in harmony with the subject of our meditation ; and, in any case, they should correspond with the most urgent needs of our souls. It is, indeed, always easy to find in the mystery we are considering some example of the virtue we actually need most. The mysteries of our adorable Victim always afford most conspicuous and practical examples of active goodness.

3. *The resolutions should have to do with some proximate occasion for their exercise.* It may be they will concern some business, or conversation, or duty of our calling, some temptation, or the like. This is a capital opportunity for reminding ourselves of our

prayer, and of continuing it, so to speak, during the rest of the day.

Nevertheless, our resolutions should always be accompanied with distrust of ourselves, simplicity, and discretion ; they should never be extraordinary, whatever be our impression of the grace received in prayer. Humility is the foundation of everything. Let us never forget this.

III. *The Conclusion of the Prayer.*—We may sum up this under three heads.

1. We go over our prayer once more to thank our Lord for any light, comfort, or strength He may have imparted to us, and, to beg Him to pardon any faults of inattention or irreverence we may have committed. Unfortunately, this last always has to be done. What can we do, even when at our best, that has not upon it some trace of our incorrigible wretchedness ?

2. Let us make an act of entire self-abandonment, yielding up all our dispositions, our resolutions, our life, our death, and our eternal future to the merciful heart of Jesus, and into the hands of our loving Mother. Never forget Mary. Let us begin and end all our doings, especially those that belong to Jesus, with our Queen of love.

3. Let us take away some good thought with us. Something may have struck us more particularly. Let us give this thought the form of an ejaculatory prayer. Thus may we make what St. Francis of Sales calls a *Spiritual Bouquet*.

Then we close with a few vocal prayers, such as the *Anima Christi*, *Sub tuum praesidium*, *O Jesu, vivens in Maria*, which are all to be found in the *Raccolta*.

## V

*Hints for Meditation on the Mysteries of our Lord*

1. The science of prayer is a divine gift. Neither mental attainments nor cleverness and aptitude are indispensable conditions for obtaining so high a grace. Constant supplication and humility are the best means to secure it.

2. Mental prayer connected with the mysteries of our Lord brings with it a special grace. It is usually fuller of illumination and unction than any other ; sometimes both heart and mind find pleasure in it ; but such consolations must not be unduly dwelt upon. Make use of such feelings to impress yourself with that which is substantial in the mystery ; but do not pride yourself on any new knowledge you

may acquire, or any sensible impression of grace you may experience, or supernatural sweetness you may be favoured with. To allow oneself to be made the slave of such consolations is to run the risk of becoming a plaything of the evil one.

3. Begin your prayer in the spirit of Jesus when He came into the world, saying lovingly and humbly to the Father: "Behold Thy victim in all lowliness desiring to be wholly consumed to Thy glory in the fire of Thy charity." Mental prayer rightly understood is an entire sacrifice of self to God in the spirit of Jesus the Victim.

4. Any difficulty you may meet with in trying to pray may arise from various causes. Perhaps this kind of exercise is unfamiliar to you, perhaps your preparation is not sufficiently careful, perhaps you are not mortified enough outwardly or inwardly, perhaps you are looking for spiritual consolations, perhaps it is God's will that you should pass through some of the trials spoken of by the Holy Ghost as follows: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God . . . prepare thy soul for temptation."<sup>1</sup> Your experience and the counsels of your director will reveal the true state of the case. But

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. ii. 1.

never be discouraged: the harder mental prayer is at the outset the more abundant is the outpouring of grace afterwards.

5. The method I have outlined perhaps seems somewhat intricate. It is really very full. If you are not accustomed to the practice of mental prayer, follow it as well as you can. After a certain amount of aridity and a feeling of incapacity, you will perhaps succeed in carrying out the holy exercise with much profit.

6. If you are accustomed to mental prayer, you probably already have a method of your own, which may not differ substantially from that which I have suggested, though not quite the same in form. The tree is known by its fruit. Your own experience and your director's advice will tell you whether any modifications are to be made in your ordinary practice; but do nothing without counsel, so as to make no mistakes in a path which is full of stumbling-blocks.

7. Some persons have quite a simple way of praying. They make a series of acts during the whole of the period assigned to mental prayer. Let them take care that this method, which in their case may be due to the leadings of grace, does not result in spiritual idleness or sensuality; for this would be a sad mistake.

8. Do not hesitate to use a book from time to time. Sometimes, too, break off your ordinary method and go back to the method of beginners, which is the one we have given. This is a safeguard against slackness of spirit, and against a passive state which is too often a subtle form of self-seeking.

9. Nothing is more individual than mental prayer. Out of twenty people meditating upon the same subject, hardly two will take the same line. This is due to the difference of men's minds and of the operations of grace in them, and to the variety of spiritual needs. But in all, prayer should help to fashion the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore do all you can that it may bring forth in you the same fruits as it has produced in the Saints.

10. Learn to pray not only during the hour or half-hour devoted to this holy exercise ; but retain as well as you can throughout the occupations of the day any impressions of grace you may have received. Then you will be able to say with St. Paul : "For me to live is Christ."

# JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

## I

### THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

## I

#### *How it came about*

WHEN the consummation decreed by the divine Wisdom was fulfilled, when the number of the holy patriarchs and prophets and just men who were to be the figures and forerunners of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the various events of His temporal life was completed, when all the mysterious preparation for the coming of our divine Redeemer, and especially the most wonderful and indispensable part of it, the sanctification of Mary, had attained the degree of perfection foreordained by God,—then the great mystery of the Incarnation took place.

At midnight on the twenty-fifth of March holy Mary is praying, engaged in earnest sup-

## 2 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

plication for the coming of the promised Deliverer. Then the Archangel Gabriel is sent by God. Coming down from heaven he announces to the Blessed Virgin the designs of the Most Holy Trinity with regard to her. Mary is troubled: she is anxious as to her glorious virginity. The Angel bids her not to fear. She gives her consent, which God willed for the execution of the great work, saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word." **AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US.**

The Incarnation of the Word is the work of the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. The Father sent the Son to fulfil the mystery: the Son loved His Father's command with an infinite love, and came down to the earth to accomplish it. And the Holy Ghost clothed Him with the humanity He took upon Himself in Mary's womb by forming His adorable manhood of the immaculate substance of His Blessed Mother.

Thus the Father performs the great work, because He alone sends His Son. Thus He is its first Author, and He is also its last End, for it will be unto His glory, since the Son only

comes into the world for His Father's glory. But the Son also carries out the wonderful work, because He alone takes upon Himself a soul and a body like ours, and it is He who thus attains the ends proposed by the Father. The Holy Ghost, too, is the Author of the mystery, because it is He who forms in Mary's womb the human nature in which the Son so greatly glorifies the Father, and because it is by His power that Jesus as man offers Himself from the very beginning of the Incarnation as a spotless Sacrifice unto the Father.<sup>1</sup>

But the great and lowly Virgin, too, cooperates in the high work, and that in several ways: (1) because she gives her consent, which God willed to be indispensable; (2) because she gives her virgin blood, and this was necessary for making the holy humanity of Jesus; and (3) because she conceives in her chaste womb in a miraculous but most real manner the divine Word, who thus becomes truly her own Son.

Such is the mystery. Make several acts of faith, adoration, praise, thankfulness, and love, and felicitate Mary.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 14.

## II

*The Excellence of the Mystery*

This mystery is the greatest, the highest, the deepest, the most immense of all the works of God. Nothing like it had been wrought when the hosts of angelic spirits were created in heaven, nor when the earth was made out of nothing, and nothing like it will ever be wrought throughout all the ages. The Man-God is the utmost limit of the omnipotence of the Most Holy Trinity. All other works are, as it were, but trials of divine Omnipotence when compared with this work which is creative and yet infinite ; for this unique work is Jesus Christ ! . . . Jesus Christ, that is to say, all created and uncreated grandeurs and glories and perfections united in one being ; Jesus Christ, the absolute joy of the Father, and His most excellent glory ; Jesus Christ, our salvation and our life, the Source of all grace and glory and supernatural beauty in Angels and men ; Jesus Christ, the sole and universal Pattern of all supernatural virtues and of every work that merits life eternal ; Jesus Christ, Mediator, Saviour, King, Lawgiver, supreme Judge, and especially Priest of God and our own Priest, Victim of God and our own Victim !

Here is the divine marvel, here is the masterpiece of the power and the wisdom and the love of the Most Holy Trinity ; here is what all heaven admires and adores and gives thanks for, and loves from the beginning until now, and for ever and ever.

Join in the homage of the Angels and the elect ; specially join with Mary, the divinely immaculate, desiring to share in the dispositions and feelings she experienced at the moment when this ineffable mystery was wrought in her.

### III

#### *The Purpose of the Mystery*

In the mind of the Most Holy Trinity the purpose of the Incarnation was the manifestation of its immense love for men. This is why our Lord says : “God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son.”<sup>1</sup> St. John, the disciple of love, also says : “By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world.”<sup>2</sup> Everywhere in Holy Scripture and in the Fathers, love is seen to be the first prin-

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John iv. 9.

## 6 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

ciple of this great work. And St. Paul says expressly : “Evidently great is the mystery of godliness, which was manifested in the flesh.”<sup>1</sup>

In the mind of Jesus Christ the purpose of the Incarnation is the honour and glory of His Father; it is the perfect worship due to His adorable Father, a worship He pays by taking upon Himself the state of a Victim at the very moment of His divine conception, a state which He keeps for ever and ever ; it is also a reparation for the wrong done by sin to God. Jesus sees His Father only, and for His glory and for the love of Him He comes to save us, to load us with graces and merits, and desires to make all of us sacrifices entirely offered up to the majesty of His Father ; and lastly, He desires to raise us to the honour and joy of the beatific vision in heaven.

Considered with regard to men, the Incarnation is the action whereby men, God’s enemies since the fall and abandoned to the sway of Satan, are delivered from that hard and shameful bondage, and restored to the friendship of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION 7

God by the superabundant satisfaction and infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

Renew the acts you have already made.—Here dwell especially on thankfulness.—Do not forget to join with Mary.

## II

### AT THE MOMENT OF THE INCARNATION JESUS CHRIST IS MADE A PRIEST FOR EVER

#### I

*It is of faith that Jesus Christ is a Priest*

OUR Lord's priesthood is an article of our faith found in Holy Scripture, taught by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and defined by the great Councils. Divinely inspired David sings in his Psalm cix: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit Thou at My right hand: until I make Thy enemies Thy footstool. The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedec." And St. Paul and all the Fathers understood these words to refer to our Lord's priesthood. A great part of the Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to the praise of His divine priesthood. Tertullian calls the incarnate Word "God's High Priest, the Priest of eternal sacrifice." From St. Cyprian to St. Ambrose we find the same testimony. St. Augustine

says that our Lord is “the one Prince of all Priests.” St. Prosper, St. Leo, and St. Fulgentius delight to acclaim Him as “Priest and Victim! Propitiator and Propitiation.” Indeed, one might quote from all the Fathers.<sup>1</sup> How beautiful is this unanimous witness of all the ages on behalf of our adorable Redeemer! And it is sanctioned and crowned by the definitions of the holy Councils. At Ephesus and at Trent the truth of Christ’s priesthood was acclaimed by the Church, and there proclaimed as a dogma of the faith.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is Priest! In the Old Law those who bore the title were but figures of Jesus the eternal Priest, and the ceremonies of their ordination and ministry took all their solemnity from the fact that they announced the greatness of the priesthood of our adorable High Priest.

The priests of the New Law are really priests in virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders which is conferred upon them, but they are only raised to so high a dignity because

<sup>1</sup> See *Patrol. lat.*, Tertullian, II, col. 447.—St. Cyprian, IV, 376.—St. Hilary, IX, 919.—St. Ambrose, XVI, 607.—St. Augustine, XXXIII, 769, etc.—St. Prosper, LI, 381.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Ephesus, Can. 10.—Of Trent, Sess. XXII, Can. 1 and 2.

## 10 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

they are the vicars and ministers of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and all their holy and venerable functions are only intended to apply the merits of our one High Priest to the faithful.

Jesus is Priest ! In Him all is great and glorious and divine ; but the title of Priest and of High Priest appears as the highest and most glorious of all in His various mysteries. He is our King, our Lord, our Teacher, our Pastor and Judge. But His office of Priest is above all the rest, and this is why : the names of King, Master, Teacher, and Judge merely show the relations between the incarnate Word and His creatures, whereas the title of Priest expresses the constant and eternal relations He has with His Father.

Let us do obeisance to the priesthood of Jesus, and unite with Mary, and with Angels and Saints in making acts of faith and adoration and praise and felicitation.

## II

*At the First Moment of the Incarnation Jesus Christ became a Priest*

This is the teaching of St. Paul in the following words: "Neither doth any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was. So Christ also did not glorify Himself that He might be made a High Priest: but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee."<sup>1</sup>

Here we learn what at first seems to be a strange truth applied to our Lord. St. Paul says: "No man hath the right to take the honour of the priesthood to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was." But it is quite certain that what the great Apostle says here not only applies to men, but even to the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. For this humanity, considered in itself and apart from its union with the divine Person of the Word, possesses neither merits nor virtues. Of its own nature, it has none, since of its own nature no creature possesses anything. It was raised to a supernatural state by grace. And it received the honour of this promotion owing to the

<sup>1</sup> Heb. v. 4, 5.

hypostatic union, and it lies in the sanctifying grace which was shed upon it in all fulness by the Most Holy Trinity. But just as it required grace, so had it to receive from the same adorable Trinity the honour of the priesthood. And this honour was granted to the holy humanity of Jesus, and it was given at the moment of His Incarnation ; not before, since it was then non-existent, nor afterwards, according to the word of God reported by St. Paul : “Thou art My Son ; this day have I begotten Thee.” For this word, in the application here made of it by St. Paul, cannot apply to the eternal generation of the Word. If it referred thereto, that would be as much as to say that Jesus Christ is a priest in virtue of being God, which would be false, since the same St. Paul teaches us that every priest is taken from among men.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as God, our Lord is equal to His Father, and therefore cannot render worship to Him ; for to render worship implies inferiority in the worshipper. Hence we must conclude that the saying refers to the temporal generation of the incarnate Word.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is at the very moment of

<sup>1</sup> Heb. v. 1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *in Ps. cix.*, 16, 17.—*Patrol. lat.*, XXXVII, 1459.

His Incarnation that Jesus Christ was made Priest and a High Priest, and it was from His Father, through the Holy Ghost, that He received the divine unction of His priesthood. The very name of Christ, which means *anointed*, in the opinion of the Fathers,<sup>1</sup> is a proof of His sacerdotal consecration.

Renew now your acts of adoration, faith, praise, and love.

### III

#### *Jesus Christ a Priest for ever*

This is another article of faith, taught by the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers, and defined by the Councils.

Jesus Christ is a priest for ever, because He was made a priest from the very beginning of His temporal life, and it is inevitable that He should always bear the note of it in heaven itself, and carry out this office through all eternity. In truth, the relations set up between Him and His Father will subsist eternally ; these relations are such as arise from the state of every

<sup>1</sup> *Christus Jesus in ipsius nominis Sacramento summus Sacerdos Patris est.* Tertull., *Patrol. lat.*, II, 330. — Cf. St. Aug., St. Prosper, etc.

creature with regard to the Creator. But, these relations are only perfectly fulfilled in the matter of Sacrifice. But if He is the Victim, who can act as Priest for His Sacrifice unless it be Himself ? And this is why His priesthood is bound to be eternal.

God the Father says to His Son in Psalm cix : “ Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.” The words “ after the order of Melchisedec ” are intended to teach us that the priesthood of Jesus Christ is not like that of the children of Aaron, who ceased to be priests at death,<sup>1</sup> as St. Paul also observes ; but He has neither forerunner nor successor, like Melchisedec, who prefigured Him. Melchisedec, the priest of the Most High, appears in the Bible as having neither father nor mother nor ancestors, that is to say, as not descending from a father who was a priest before him, and as having had no successor in his office. And thus it was in the case of our divine High Priest.<sup>2</sup> He had no predecessor, since the priests of old had only a figurative priesthood, and he has no successor, since Popes and Bishops and Priests are not, properly speaking,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius à Lapide in Heb. vii. 3.

successors, but His ministers and vicars. And hence St. Paul concludes: "But this, for that He continueth for ever (after His resurrection), hath an everlasting priesthood."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus Christ is a Priest for ever ! His authority as King or Teacher will not be exercised everlasting, because when all the elect "are made perfect in one," when they "will see God in the light of His divinity," and when "God will be all in all,"<sup>2</sup> they will no longer need to be ruled, directed, and enlightened ; but Jesus Christ will be a priest for ever, because He will ever offer Himself to His Father, and the Saints will be victims along with Him for ever, and He will offer them eternally in union with His indefectible Sacrifice ; and thus, amidst all His other titles, His priesthood will be an eternal priesthood.

Admire these great truths, ask for grace to enter fully into them, and renew your acts of faith, admiration, praise, and love.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John xvii. 23.—Ps. xxxv. 10.—1 Cor. xv. 28.

### III

JESUS CHRIST, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST, MADE  
A TRUE ACT OF PRIESTHOOD, WHICH IS  
SACRIFICE, WHEN HE OFFERED HIMSELF  
AT THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS INCARNA-  
TION

#### I

*The proper Office of a Priest is Sacrifice*

This truth is taught in the following words :  
" Every high priest taken from among men is  
ordained for men in the things that appertain  
to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacri-  
fices."<sup>1</sup>

God is the supreme and infinite and one and  
only Good. " I will shew thee all good,"<sup>2</sup> saith  
the Lord unto Moses, and shows him Himself.  
Therefore He merits all honour and glory, and  
has a right to the worship of all creatures.  
But the priest is a man of God,<sup>3</sup> as St. Paul  
calls him ; that is to say, his mission, vocation,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. v. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xxxiii. 19.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 17.

and function is to apply himself to the worship of God, to render to Him the homage which is His due. He is a man of God to fulfil all the rights God has over His creatures. But this necessary and high end is attained by means of sacrifice ; it is by this holy work above all others that he answers as far as he can to all that God is in Himself and to all that He is in reference to His creatures. Hence, sacrifice is the essential work of the priest, and, in a sense, the one work.

This is why the Church calls the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass simply "the Action," meaning that it is the action *par excellence*, in comparison with which all others are as nothing in the sight of God, unless they draw their life from the power that flows from this great Action.

True it is that the priest not only says Holy Mass ; he has other work to do : he preaches the word of God, he administers the sacraments, he directs souls in the way of salvation, he comforts the afflicted, he toils laboriously for the conversion of sinners ; but all these various works have to be carried out in the spirit of sacrifice, else they are valueless in the sight of God.

How high is the dignity of the priest ! how

## 18 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

glorious it is in the sight of God Himself ! No other can be compared with it. It is truly all divine. Through it God looks down upon the world with love, and through it the world ascends to God. It is the link between these two extremes, God and the sinner ; it is like Jacob's ladder ; by it the supplications and sighs of earth rise up to heaven, and God's blessings descend upon the earth.

Rekindle your faith in the great dignity of the priesthood.—Thank God for the favours He bestows upon you through its ministry, and examine yourselves as to your inward and outward conduct with regard to God's priests.

### II

*Our Lord exercises His Priesthood by the Oblation of Himself from the Moment of His Incarnation*

No sooner does Jesus receive the dignity of the priesthood at the first moment of His Incarnation than He performs the essential work of His office : He offers His Sacrifice. But what a sacrifice ! a sacrifice worthy of so high a priesthood, the sacrifice of His own flesh and blood, the sacrifice of all He had received from

His Father, of the human life which was only His to be offered. Hear St. Paul as to the manner of this offering :

“ When He cometh into the world (by His Incarnation), He saith : Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not (*i.e.* fully accept, as offered under the Law) : but a body (a worthy sacrifice through being united with the godhead) Thou hast offered Me.

“ Holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then I said : Behold I come : in the head of the book it is written of Me : that I should do Thy will, O my God.”

And then he goes on :

“ In saying before, Sacrifices and holocausts for sin Thou wouldest not, neither are they pleasing to Thee, which are offered according to the law. Then said I, Behold I come to do Thy will, O my God: He taketh away the first, that He may establish that which followeth.”

Thus far St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> Commentators add : “ This new sacrifice is that of the body of Jesus Christ, which is offered and immolated for the salvation of the world.”

And thus it was that our adorable High Priest offered His holy and infinite sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 5-9.

## 20 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

What constitutes the perfection and excellence of a sacrifice is just the excellence of the offering, and next the excellence of the dispositions of the offerer.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in the first place, in the oblation of Jesus, the perfection of the offering, that is to say, of the Victim, is ineffable. Throughout eternity it will exhaust all the adoration and admiration and praise of Angels and of Saints. God alone in His omniscience knows and understands its excellence and perfection. Thus is it that in the Victim offered by our great High Priest, and in that High Priest Himself God finds His full satisfaction. Of the sacrifices of old it was said that the Lord received them as a sweet-smelling odour;<sup>2</sup> but when they are compared with that offered by our High Priest, then we must say with the Truth eternal : “The old sacrifices and oblations and holocausts for sin Thou wouldest not.”

The perfection of the Victim Himself is known to God alone. And thus it is with the perfection and excellence of the dispositions of the Offerer. St. Paul calls Him : “A High Priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from

<sup>1</sup> St. Aug., *Patrol. lat.*, XLII, 901.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. viii. 21.

sinners, and made higher than the heavens";<sup>1</sup> but what can words, however glorious, mean, when applied to Jesus? . . . His divine Heart enters into dispositions of worship, love, and devotion to the honour and glory of His Father, but these will be all unknown for ever, at least so far as all their divine beauty is concerned.

Here let us fall prostrate with the Angels and the Saints in the deepest annihilation to honour this mystery. O mystery divine but incomprehensible! O mystery worthy of God! O loving theme of eternal and infinite rejoicing! O delightful theme for the contemplation of the blessed!

### III

*From the Moment of the Incarnation the Sacrifice of our Lord has all its own special Perfection*

The inward sacrifice must be distinguished from the outward sacrifice of our adorable High Priest. The latter draws all its value from the former, and is composed of a succession of acts. Just as in the sacrifices of old, which were figures of the sacrifice of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vii. 26.

## 22 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

Christ, there were, the oblation, the immolation, and the rest, so in the outward life of our Lord there are mysteries, some of which form His oblation, and others His immolation, as a Victim. And this is why the outward sacrifice can only be said to be perfect by degrees, and when all the essential parts of a sacrifice were fulfilled.

But it is not thus with His inward sacrifice. It was fully perfect from the first moment of the Incarnation, and this sacrifice it was which won us our Redemption. At that very moment, He acquired all the merits He had to win for us, and then our Redemption was really accomplished. The outward sacrifice was unfolded during three and thirty years; but it added nothing to the value of the sacrifice made in the womb of Mary. It was merely a wonderful and ever adorable expansion and development of it.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, it may truly be said that in the womb of His Mother Jesus is the perfect Victim we shall afterwards have to adore in the Crib, in His Passion, and on the Cross. In fact, through His most clear knowledge of all the circumstances of the outward sacrifice, and by His

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, q. xxxiv, a. 3.—Cornelius à Lapide, *in Heb.*, x. 7.

generous and loving acceptance of it, He suffered from that moment poverty, cold, and all the other discomforts of life ; He was betrayed and buffeted, He wore His crown of thorns, He was loaded with the Cross, His body was covered with wounds, and He was crucified. . . .

Oh, how great are God's works ! . . . Renew your acts of admiration, faith, adoration, love, and thanksgiving.

## IV

### OUR DIVINE VICTIM'S ADORATION AND HUMILIATIONS IN HIS INCARNATION

#### I

##### *The Cause of Jesus Christ's Humiliations*

THE first look of Jesus the Victim, the first beat of His Sacred Heart, His first act of will was so perfect and so truly the act of a Man-God as to comprise all the worship which is due to God. It was at one and the same time an act of adoration, praise, thankfulness, supplication, self-surrender, expiation, and love ; and this absolute perfection of the first act of our adorable Victim is something to admire and to adore. But as we can only conceive of things divine by imagining a kind of succession, we see, first of all, in our Lord's worship of His Father at the moment of His Incarnation an act of adoration, and in His infinite humiliations the mode of expressing that adoration.

From the first moment of His existence as a creature Jesus turned towards His Father ; and He saw in a manner most high and perfect beyond the power of Angels and Saints to contemplate throughout eternity, the infinite perfections of His Father, His eternity, His immensity, His immutability, His holiness, and all His other attributes which are infinite both in number and excellence ; and He desired to render homage to all this greatness. As God in heaven, He could not have this desire, because He was in all things equal to the Father. But now that He is inferior to the Father as to His manhood, He is able fully to satisfy the need He feels of honouring His Father ; and He sees clearly that nothing is so proper to give glory to an infinite Being as to humiliate before the Uncreated One the created being received from His hands ; and this is what He does in His first act of adoration paid to His Father. He acknowledges that He is His creature and subject ; He proclaims that He owes the Father all, and to make Him a sacrifice of all that He Himself is, He humbles Himself even to nothingness.

St. Paul reveals this wonderful truth in the following words of deepest significance : ". . . Jesus : who being in the form of

## 26 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

God, thought it not robbery, to be equal with God : but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.”<sup>1</sup>

The more He humbles Himself, the more should we adore and exalt Him by our praises, and by our great faith in His divinity and in all His infinite perfections.

Make acts corresponding to these devout feelings towards Jesus.

### II

#### *The Depth of His Humiliations*

First, Jesus humbles Himself in His manhood, and next, He appears to involve even His godhead in these humiliations.

First, He humbles Himself in His humanity. Wishing to become like unto one of us, as St. Paul says, the eternal Word might have appeared on earth as a full-grown adult, like Adam at his first creation, full of strength and majesty. He might have chosen such a state, and had He done so, we should never have expected Him to have chosen any other. More-

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 6, 7.

over, such a state would still have been to Him a state of humiliation ; for however great may be the outward dignity and beauty of a creature, it is always a concealment of the divine, a darkening of God's glory. But such an inevitable humiliation we might have imagined we understood. Now, Jesus is not satisfied with this, because it does not sufficiently express what God is and what the creature is in His sight. A Victim of adoration requires deeper depths and higher heights. Not any kind of abasement will suffice, but annihilation is what is demanded ; and this is why Jesus begins in this mysterious condition which is described by St. Paul in the words, *Exinanivit semetipsum !* (" He emptied Himself," or reduced Himself to nothing). This is the utmost limit of littleness, the most absolute impotence, the deepest darkness. His state is that of a child as soon as it is born ; but our divine Victim has His intellect in all its fulness, and therefore His humiliations are voluntary, and consequently, meritorious, and they effect our salvation.

Next, it seems as if the divinity, too, participated in this humiliation. For if it be true to say that the Person of the Word lost nothing

by the Incarnation, continuing to possess all the glory, independence, omnipotence, and all the other divine perfections which are essential to Him, it is also true that this adorable Person, who formerly spoke of naught but glory, bliss, holiness, eternity, and power, as being the essential attributes of God the Son, is now obliged to acknowledge that He has a precarious, obscure, strengthless existence, exposed to every kind of suffering and privation, and destined to die. Such is the humiliation in which the divine Person of the Word appears to us ; for the divine Word has really become a man like one of us ; and He has become this in conditions so humiliating that they are only possible in His case, since He bears all the sins and iniquities and infamies of the whole world on His shoulders.

O mystery of humiliation ! . . . O depths of the divine ! . . . O unexplored abyss ! . . . Let us abase ourselves to nothingness in astonishment and admiration ; let us increase our acts of adoration and thanksgiving.

## III.

*Our Participation in His Humiliations*

We say that our divine Victim put Himself in our place to render to His Father, in His own name and in ours, all the homage that is His due. But this does not mean that our Lord made His oblation separately and apart from us. He offered Himself, and He offered us also. He abased Himself, and He abased us along with Himself before His Father's Majesty. He was in our stead, but He represented us all, and this is why He really drew down with Him into the deeps into which He descended in His adorable humanity all men, and not only all men, but Angels also, yes, and in a true sense, all creation too. For, as St. Paul says, "In Christ all things subsist";<sup>1</sup> and this is why, when He is abased, all is abased along with Him, as also when He is exalted all is exalted with Him.

We have only to enter into this mind, as St. Paul tells us in the same passage of the Epistle to the Philippians, in which he recounts

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 17, "By Him all things consist" (Douai English).

the humiliations of our Saviour : *Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu* ("Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus").

Littleness . . . obscurity . . . weakness . . . how do we love such states as these ? or at least, if we cannot go so far as to love such humiliations, what patience and resignation do we display when divine Providence is pleased, either by the social position assigned to us, or by the ordering of events and circumstances, to make us participate in the voluntary humiliations of our adorable Victim ? The humility which is not sustained and fed with humiliation is without soundness and strength, and is often only a sham and a delusion. Our divine Master will often repeat this lesson in the succession of His mysteries ; but it is worthy of notice that, from the moment of His Incarnation, He gives us such a lesson, and that this is the first of all His lessons.

Give Him thanks lovingly ; for true humility, which is founded upon what God is and upon what we ourselves are, the humility which gives us a knowledge of our own nothingness, and leads us to take the place that belongs to us and to keep it by the love of humili-

ations,—this humility is a treasure of such high value as to purchase heaven itself. Let us examine ourselves, and take thought for the future, and make a few generous resolutions.

# V

## OUR ADORABLE VICTIM'S THANKSGIVING

### I

#### *The Necessity and Excellence of Thanksgiving*

IF we only really understood rightly what God is with regard to His creatures, we should be ceaselessly occupied in thanksgiving. Creation, the first favour He has bestowed upon us, is in the order of nature a blessing of inestimable value. It is a participation in His divine Being, a communication of His own perfections. He has made us in His own image and likeness, and, if we may venture to say so, He has caused His divine attributes to concur in the making of us ; we were in His mind from all eternity, and He has put forth on our behalf His omnipotence and wisdom and charity ; He has so far committed us to His fatherly Providence as to say : “ The very hairs of your head are all numbered.”<sup>1</sup> What a mystery of condescension and goodness !

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 7, xxi. 18.

But there is another favour of far higher and more priceless value, whereby God has raised us to the supernatural order, thus calling us to be not only His subjects but His children, not only in name but also in reality ; and, in consequence of this grace, to participate in the inheritance of heaven, and one day to enjoy the beatific vision.<sup>1</sup> For such is the end of the supernatural order to which He has raised us from the lower state in which we were placed by creation.

Here are depths of divine favour of which we can form no true idea in our time of exile. Moreover, however perfect our thanksgiving may be, we shall be too weak through all eternity to repay the debt of gratitude we owe to God for so many favours bestowed upon us. And once more, here we have only to do with general favours. There are also special blessings conferred upon each creature, which in a manner infinitely increase the debt of love and gratitude.

Jesus comes into the world and becomes a Victim in order to supplement our insufficiency. As He is a Victim of adoration, so is He also an eucharistic Victim, that is to say, a Victim of thanksgiving, this being the meaning of the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 17.

word *eucharistic*. He more than discharges our debt by the perfection of His thanksgiving.

Let us join with Him in discharging it to our Creator, our Father, our Sanctifier, to the God of love eternal who loads us with so many blessings. . . .

But Jesus has in Himself peculiar reasons for thanksgiving.

## II

### *How Jesus is Himself bound to this Duty*

Here we are in the presence of a world of supernatural beauty such as God alone can see. Jesus was Himself bound to thanksgiving, but in a pre-eminent way, such as neither heaven nor earth has ever known. This is because Jesus as man (for He is a Victim as man) has received from His Father far more graces than Angels or men ever have received or ever can receive, even if divine omnipotence were eternally exercised in conferring them. And Jesus knew this, and His created soul and His Sacred Heart had ever before them the splendid vision of these innumerable and incomparable graces ! Let us now endeavour to enumerate the chief of these :

1. *The grace of hypostatic union*, that is to say, the union which consists in the uniting of the human nature to a divine Person, having no personality of its own (which would have reduced it to our common and inferior state), but having as its personality that of God which entirely divinized it ; and thus its acts become God's acts, and its states and dispositions the states and dispositions of God.

2. *Sanctifying grace*, which, in consequence of the hypostatic union was conferred upon the soul of our divine Victim in a manner so wonderful and complete and absolute, that not only does it surpass in value all the grace conferred upon all Angels and all Saints, but it is the sole principle and source of all graces communicated to creatures. All virtues and supernatural gifts, all that can be communicated to the creature in the way of holiness and perfection coming from God, was given to the soul of Jesus.

3. *The beatific vision*, that is to say, the clear sight of God and of the divine essence enjoyed by the holy soul of our adorable Victim from the first moment of His Incarnation, a sight of which He was never deprived, not even in the agony of the Garden of Olives and upon the Cross, a vision more clear than that of the

highest Seraphim, a vision whereby He had a full knowledge of God and of all His works.

4. *A body and flesh endued with perfect holiness*, that is to say, having only such inclinations as were worthy of the hypostatic union with the Person of the Word. And not only was this divine flesh holy, being the true and worthy temple of the Holy Ghost, but also sanctifying, as our Lord Himself says in announcing the institution of the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup>

How many graces are here found united ! and how many others there are the knowledge of which is reserved for eternity !

Who can understand the gratitude of soul of our adorable Victim ? Adore His thankfulness in all its perfection ; praise Jesus for all He has received, and for all the thanksgivings He gives to His Father, a gratitude proportioned to the favours bestowed upon His humanity.

### III

*How our Lord fulfils the Duty of Thanksgiving*

Now let us consider the four great characteristics of our divine Victim's thanksgiving.

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 55.

They may be named as follows: depth, height, extent, duration.

1. *Depth*.—How deep was Jesus Christ's thanksgiving from the first moment of His Incarnation! His incomprehensible humiliations are not only an expression of adoration, they are still more an expression of thanksgiving. Jesus descends to bottomless deeps in His feeling of nothingness as a creature in the presence of the infinite Being who is His Father, and also in His sense of gratitude for the ineffable benefits with which He is filled. The feeling of thankfulness being proportioned to our feeling of nothingness, the soul which receives any signal grace is thrown into a kind of confusion, and, in the presence of Him who deigns thus to honour it, it falls prostrate and sinks down, and desires to testify the thankfulness it feels by a kind of losing of itself. This is what is felt by the soul of our divine Victim, so that His thanksgiving possesses all the depth of adoration and humiliation we have already considered.

2. *Height*.—How high is the thanksgiving of Jesus Christ! It is the height of love. To be so loved from the first, to be so loved by

God Himself, when we feel that we deserve no love, how does this call forth our love ! The humanity of Christ, considered in itself, that is to say, considered as having the nature of a creature, apart from its union with the Word, was devoid of all good ; and now, how divine are its riches, treasures communicated not precariously, but for all eternity ! At this thought, the soul and heart of Jesus thrill with love, and rise towards the Author of such great graces with transports of gratitude which are unfathomable secrets to ourselves, dead as we are to God's blessings, and too often ungrateful.

3. *Extent.*—How immense is the thanksgiving of Jesus Christ ! It took in the whole world of the humanity of Christ. This was the first subject of His thanksgiving ; but it included all that the prodigality and love and providence and mercy of the Holy Trinity had poured forth upon all creatures. The graces conferred upon Mary, the wonderful Mother of our Victim, were one of the special subjects of His thanksgiving ; but then Jesus also fulfilled all that is due to the Father for so many blessings and favours of every kind communicated to numberless angelic spirits and to all mankind. And this thanksgiving was not only

general, but was offered to the Father in a distinct and special way for each one of them. Jesus had clearly in view the least one of such graces, and He lifted up His soul to the Father to thank Him for all His goodness and love on behalf of His creatures, and this He did with measureless transports of love.

4. *Duration.*—How long the thanksgiving of Jesus Christ lasted ! It began with the beginning of the Incarnation, and it then existed in all its perfection ; and it continued to rise towards the Father's heart every moment of Jesus Christ's earthly life. When He instituted the Holy Sacrament of the altar, He set Himself there as a Victim of gratitude, and this Sacrament is called by the Church the *Eucharist*, meaning the Sacrament of thanksgiving. Lastly, in heaven for ever and ever Jesus will appear as a Victim of thanksgiving before His Father, blessing and thanking Him for all the graces He has conferred upon men and Angels during their time of trial, and for the glory He will give them, and for the bliss He will impart to them, through all eternity.

Adore, praise, and return thanks for this delightful spectacle of love ; and unite lovingly with the thanksgivings of the divine Victim.

## VI

### OUR DIVINE VICTIM'S PRAYER OF SUPPLICA- TION AT THE FIRST MOMENT OF THE IN- CARNATION

#### I

#### *The Beauty of our Lord's Prayer in Mary's Womb*

WHAT a world of wonders is the Blessed Virgin's womb when the Incarnation of the Son of God takes place ! The divine and eternal Word dwells therein as in a temple worthier than that of heaven itself where dwell the Angels. In this living temple He offers His Father the only sacrifice that is worthy of His infinite majesty. The life of Jesus in this true Holy of Holies, of which the Old Testament shrine was but a faint figure, is a life of perpetual praise, an incessant adoration, an uninterrupted thanksgiving. This life is a constant state and act of most perfect religion. How high is this state ! How delightful through all eternity to Angels and men is this

act, since it fulfils to the full the Father's good pleasure and joy !

But Jesus Christ not only adores and praises and gives thanks, He also is a prayerful suppliant in the presence of the Father's majesty. He prays because He is a Priest, since, according to St. Paul, "every high priest is ordained in the things that appertain to God";<sup>1</sup> but prayer is offered unto God ; and, as a Victim, He prays ; for He is a Victim for His creatures with all their needs.

Therefore, from His first moment in Mary's womb, Jesus uplifts His holy soul to God in the most perfect supplication that ever ascended to the throne of grace. A single sigh of our divine Victim's Heart was more pleasing to God than all the hymns of heavenly spirits throughout eternity. How wonderful was this uplifting of Jesus' soul ! Nor will it ever cease, even as His adoration and praise and thanksgiving never cease. The nine months in the Blessed Virgin's womb, the days of His holy Childhood and hidden life, the time of His public life and Passion, His life in heaven and in the Eucharist, are full of this incessant sup-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. v. 1.—St. Thomas, III, q. 22, a. 4, ad 1. *Oratio qua Christus oravit ad ejus sacerdotium pertinet.*

plication. As St. Paul says: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us."<sup>1</sup>

And this supplication, beginning with the Incarnation and going on for ever, possesses two characteristics which we may observe and adore: humility and confidence.

*Humility.*—Jesus put Himself in our place, and in a manner took upon Himself our poverty and unworthiness; and in this state He acknowledged the insufficiency of the creature, and of all creatures. He acknowledged that He had to ask even for Himself, as we shall see in our next consideration; and nothing can express how deeply He abased Himself in His supplication, nor all the respect for the Father involved in this self-abasement. St. Paul notes the great respect implied in the humility of Jesus. He tells us, Jesus "was heard for His reverence."<sup>2</sup>

But His *confidence* was as high as His humility was deep. Jesus clearly saw the Father's infinite love of souls. He considered it as an immense ocean waiting to flood the whole world with blessings and graces, and in the contemplation of this His soul was uplifted in the boundless confidence of His supplications. And during His public life He is led by this

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. v. 7.

absolute and filial confidence thus to address the Father: "Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me. I knew that Thou hearest Me always."<sup>1</sup>

Admire this divine wonder. Adore Jesus in His state of perpetual supplication of the Father, and ask Him to let you participate in His wonderful spirit of prayer.

## II

### *The End of our Victim's Prayer*

The one end of our divine Victim's prayer appears to have been His Father's glory, His *extrinsic* and *accidental* glory, as theologians call it to distinguish it from the essential glory eternally belonging to God, for it is the glory that consists in exalting His adorable Name, and in the reign and triumph of His holy will in the souls of men. From the first moment of His earthly existence, Jesus prayed for this exaltation and triumph with the highest transports of love. We might affirm that He made the wonderful prayer He was to teach men later on from the very outset, saying in the depths of His humiliation: "My Father (or regarding

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 41, 42.

Himself as man's representative), our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven !” Thus He prayed, and thus He asked for all things, both for His Father and for ourselves ; for the glorifying of His Father, and His reign and triumph in the world, and the perfect fulfilment of His holy will in our souls—all this means our sanctification in this world, and our eternal salvation in the world to come ; in our poor time of exile it means the gathering together of all graces, the graces of conversion and faith and hope and charity, the graces of peace and light and comfort and strength ; and in our heavenly home, eternal glory and endless bliss in the vision and possession of God.

Jesus offered up this indispensable and immeasurable prayer. He made it, and obtained all He asked for on behalf of His elect.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In saying here “ His elect,” we mean all souls of goodwill who were to receive His graces and merits, and to turn them to good account. When Jesus prays on their behalf, He is always answered ; for their correspondence with His grace in a sense determines the efficacy of His prayer. But man has free will, and whoever resists such divine mercy unhappily makes of none effect even the prayers of Him who has so loved us as to die for each one of us.

O marvellous prayer of our sweet Saviour ! O wondrous love of His divine Heart from the very beginning of His life in the darkest depths of His state as a Victim ! Let us abandon ourselves to the highest admiration, to the deepest gratitude, let us take the utmost care never to make of none effect His wonderful supplication on our behalf, and all His divine watchfulness, through our indifference and lukewarmness.

Here we must add, since we are taught thus by the Gospel and the holy Doctors, that Jesus also prayed for Himself, not for His divinity, not for His soul, but for His passible and mortal body, a body which He took upon Himself in the Blessed Virgin's womb for the love of us.<sup>1</sup> Since our divine Victim willed to be clothed with a body like unto our own, subject to our infirmities, and, as the Apostle says, "in the likeness of sinful flesh,"<sup>2</sup> this body, adorable though it was, had, "if we consider its passible nature," as St. Thomas says,<sup>3</sup> to be subject to the general law of death, and therefore subject to the consequences of death, that is to say, it had to lie lifeless in the tomb after being buried.

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, III, q. 21, a. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 3.—Phil. ii. 7.—Heb. iv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas, III, q. 51, a. 3, ad 2.

But Jesus desired for the love of us to be an immortal Victim (which would have been impossible had He remained in the tomb), and He therefore prayed for His resurrection from the dead, and, according to St. Anselm, He implored for this all His life long.<sup>1</sup> And therefore He prayed to His Father for this, even in the Blessed Virgin's womb.

Let us adore and bless our sweet Saviour who is thus ever busy on our behalf. If He implores the honour of being raised from the dead, He seeks not His own glory, but our salvation ; for, says St. Paul, " He rose again for our justification." And thus He became a Victim who could die no more and would never cease to intercede for us. Therefore, as St. Anselm and St. Thomas finely observe, "whatever grace Jesus prays for is solely intended for our good."

Renew your adoration and thanksgiving, and tell your good and merciful Lord that you desire to belong entirely to Him in the same way as He desires to be altogether yours.

<sup>1</sup> *Tota vita sua (Christus) Patrem oravit de resurrectione carnis sua.* Brev. Rom. in off. Orat. Domini, 2 Noct. Lect. v.—*Item*, St. Thomas, III, q. 21, a. 3, ad 2.—*et ubi supra*, a. 3, ad 3.

III

*Our Prayers owe all their Efficacy to Jesus  
Christ's Prayer*

We can do nothing to merit heaven, nor even have a single good thought, without grace. Now, prayer is the ordinary means appointed by God Himself for the acquisition of grace. God in all His goodness does us the honour of making us appear to merit by the fervour of our supplications what He really freely bestows upon us.

But our poor prayers cannot ascend unassisted to the throne of His divine majesty ; they must be as it were uplifted and sustained, and finally presented at the throne of grace, in virtue of another prayer which is infallibly well pleasing to Him.

And this prayer which He is ever ready to accept and to answer is the prayer addressed by our adorable Victim to His Father on our behalf at the very beginning of His life, and He carried it on till His last breath, and still continues to send it up to His Father's throne. Jesus prayed for us, and He was the first to ask for all we can ask for even now from our heavenly Father's heart ; so that to-day, when

we implore any grace, we may say that the subject of our petitions was known to the Father from the very moment that Jesus took flesh in the womb of His Blessed Mother. Doubtless God knows it in virtue of His infinite knowledge ; but may it not be said that He possesses such divine knowledge in a more special manner through the supplication of the incarnate Word in His most lowly state in the chaste womb of the holy Virgin Mary ?

It is the power of this primal prayer that condescends to our humble petitions and presents them and makes them well-pleasing to the heart of our heavenly Father.

And thus has it been with all the supplications that have ascended to Him from the hearts of all men in all ages. The prayers and ardent desires of the patriarchs and prophets, and of all the just in the Old Testament, only gained acceptance with God through the prayer of our adorable Victim. And from that time onwards, mankind with all its needs and wretchedness ceaselessly sends up sighs and tears to heaven. To the very end of time, the just and sinners, the weak and the afflicted, little children and the dying, all will pray and beg for all sorts of graces, temporal and

spiritual, for graces of consolation and enlightenment, of strength and peace and life, and so forth ; but it is Jesus only, and only His prayer at the moment of utter lowliness when He lay in the weakness and humiliation of an Infant in the Blessed Virgin's womb, that makes all these supplications and sighs and tears acceptable to the Father and gives them worth in His sight.

How wondrous is this ! . . . O Jesus ! Thou art the only Mediator, the only Saviour of the world ! Without Thee, we are, and can obtain, nothing ; with Thee, we have every good. All praise be Thine !

## VII

### OUR ADORABLE VICTIM'S EXPIATION FROM THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS INCARNATION

#### I

*Expiation is the most salient Note of our Lord's  
Sacrifice*

EXPIATION is the most striking feature in our adorable Victim's sacrifice. "Christ's whole life," says the *Imitation*, "was a cross and a sacrifice." We shall see Him pray to His Father, give Him thanks, and declare that He seeks only His Father's glory; but the dominant characteristic of His divine life appears to be Expiation. He is poor, humble, persecuted, hated, a Man of sorrows; and His glorious life as Man-God ends in the shameful and terrible sentence inflicted on the worst of criminals.<sup>1</sup> He is constantly an abject and a sufferer, ever doomed to expiation; such until the day of His burial is the distinguishing mark of our divine Victim.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liii. 12.

And why is this such a striking and invariable note of His sacrifice ?

It is because Jesus came into the world to abolish sin.

But what means does He make use of to destroy sin ? Assuredly, the most effective for that end. Let us consider this for awhile. He took sin upon Himself ; He imputed it in a manner to Himself. Nay more, He went still farther : He looked upon Himself, as St. Paul says, as if He were “made sin.”<sup>1</sup> What a state was His ! How strange—to our poor thoughts—was the condition to which He reduced and condemned Himself !

Hence we can now understand that there is no limit to the humiliation and suffering He was ready to undergo. For what, indeed, does sin deserve ? All the sentences and strokes of God’s justice. But Jesus knew this. Therefore He accepted all these judgements ; from His Mother’s womb He bore all these humiliations ; He received, and even loved, as if they were His due, all the strokes of God’s justice. And thus it was that He destroyed sin, destroying it in the souls of men by expiating it in Himself.

This is how expiation was the most salient mark of His sacrifice. This, too, explains

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21.

## 52 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

why, in the Old Law, in which everything pre-figures Jesus Christ, the expiatory sacrifices were the most important of all.<sup>1</sup>

Let us dwell upon this great truth. It explains everything connected with our Lord. Without this, all is incomprehensible in His life and its mysteries ; His humiliations are a stumbling-block, His voluntary sacrifices madness. To-day even, after Christianity has lasted nineteen centuries, to those who do not adore Jesus as an expiatory Victim He is but an inexplicable enigma, when He is not an object of contempt. “But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us praise our adorable Victim for bestowing upon us with regard to His divine condition of humiliation and suffering the light of faith, and let us implore His compassionate Heart that we may never make His expiation of none effect by our infidelity.

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, III, q. 73, a. 6 in corp. *Sacrificium expiationis quod erat solemnissimum.*

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.

## II

*From His Mother's Womb our Lord is a  
Victim of Expiation*

Jesus is a Victim of expiation from His Mother's womb. He teaches us this in the words, reported to us by St. Paul, which He addressed to His Father at the very beginning of His mortal life. We have already quoted them: "Wherefore when He cometh into the world He saith: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not [such as were under the Law]: but a body Thou hast fitted to Me: holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I: Behold, I come: in the head of the book [which reveals Thy designs as to the world] it is written of Me: that I should do Thy will, O God."<sup>1</sup>

And then St. Paul goes on: "In saying before [i.e., First Jesus says], Sacrifices, and oblations, and holocausts for sin Thou wouldest not, neither are they pleasing to Thee, which are offered according to the law. Then said I [i.e., then He continues], Behold, I come to do Thy will, O God: He taketh away the first, that He may establish that which followeth [i.e., He establishes a new priesthood and a new sacrifice]."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 5-9.

## 54 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

Such is the teaching of the great Apostle. But, if it be true that from the very beginning of His Incarnation Jesus did away with the former priesthood and the legal sacrifices, and particularly with the sacrifice of expiation, and put in their place a new priesthood and a new sacrifice, it is clear that He is a Victim of expiation from His Mother's womb, and that His dispositions and acts are expiatory. Otherwise expiatory sacrifice, the most important of all, as being immediately appointed to make reparation for the wrong inflicted upon God by sin, would have ceased to be offered, which is impossible. Therefore Jesus is our Victim of expiation from the first moment of His Incarnation, and He then begins to expiate for us. But, because He cannot undertake any action without completing it and performing it in perfection, His work of expiation was complete in its humiliations in His very first mystery.

Thus, taking the place of all the victims of old, and fulfilling that of which they were the figures, He willed from that very moment, like the doves, the paschal lamb, the scapegoat, to be slain, immolated, consumed, and cast far away from all men, even to become an

object of divine aversion, knowing that He bore upon Himself the sins of the whole world.

And desiring at the same time to expiate all sorts of sins immediately, He opposed to the two chief vices from which arise all offences against God, that is to say, to pride and sensualism, humiliations and all the privations He had to undergo in His mysterious captivity in the Blessed Virgin's womb. For, He was not only thus plunged in the deepest of dark humiliations ; but He who is infinitely great was reduced to the lowest littleness, He who is almighty became in a manner feebleness itself. The Word of the Father kept silence, and eternal and infinite Holiness was loaded with the confusion of all the abominations of the earth.

How great an expiation was such a condition accepted, willed, and even loved for the sake of the Father's glory and of the salvation of our souls ! How deep are the mysteries of Jesus Christ ! How lovely, too, and how full of love for us !

Let us adore, praise, and love our wonderful and lovable Victim.

## III

*How to Unite with the Dispositions of our Lord as a Victim of Expiation*

Our Lord did not offer Himself as a Victim of expiation by Himself ; He also offered His mystical body which is the Church ; and as He prayed and gave thanks for each of the members of this mystical body, so did He offer each one of them, and devoted him along with Himself as a Victim of expiation.

This is the primary reason for our union with His state and with His dispositions as a victim in the Blessed Virgin's womb. In virtue of His consecration of each one of us, we ought to be full of zeal for the destruction of sin in the world. We ought ever to be filled with the hatred of it, and we should spare nothing to hinder its sway over souls and to overthrow its dominion in those who are unfortunately subject to its tyranny. Speech, counsel, commands, prayer, all these are means a soul united with Jesus the Victim is able to use as may be required. But it will not be satisfied with such ordinarily easy expedients ; to these it will add, if it can, others more grievous to nature, such as penances and sacrifices of all kinds, and corporal mortifications : it will make a humble

use of them, it is true, yet a use that is in harmony with the spirit of Jesus in His lowliness in His Mother's womb ; but it will abandon itself with fervour to the wholly divine spirit which, like a consuming fire, seeks to destroy and abolish every offence against God from the face of the earth.

How holy and high is the spirit of Jesus the Victim of expiation ! It cannot endure anything that wrongs the reverence due to God. It is the most steadfast principle of apostolic zeal ; it is the powerful spur of the anxiety of superiors for the welfare of their subordinates. This is what drives the Saint and the anchorite to seek solitude ; and this it is that is the health-sustaining salt of the highest contemplation.

Hence, we are united with Jesus as a Victim of expiation, because He offered us along with Himself in His prayer of oblation ; and also because, being sinners, we have to expiate our own sins.

Alas ! what is our life but a perpetual offence against God ? Does a single day go by without a number of sins ? And are we to be among those careless souls who, in the language of

Scripture, "drink iniquity like water" ?<sup>1</sup> Hence we must ever stand before God in contrition and penance, as victims of expiation. This is not a matter of being in a state or having dispositions belonging to the life of perfection ; it is only a question of what is absolutely necessary to our salvation. The expression "a victim of expiation" may appear new to us, and seem to describe feelings and dispositions more supernatural than those of ordinary Christians ; and yet it is not so. Whoever has the misfortune to sin mortally against God must expiate his offence, and this is only to be done with contrition and penance : but true contrition and genuine penance make us truly expiatory victims in the sight of God, as David says : "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit,"<sup>2</sup> that is to say, a spirit afflicted by its sins.

And, if we have only venial sins to lament, they too must be expiated with contrition and penance, otherwise we shall never have them pardoned in this world, and, on leaving this life, we shall find ourselves condemned to the fires of Purgatory, where we shall be obliged by eternal Justice to become victims of expiation.

<sup>1</sup> Job xv. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 1. 19.

Let us then purify ourselves by a most intimate union with the state and dispositions of Jesus, the expiatory Sacrifice. Let us thank Him for desiring to make us participate in His spirit, the spirit of a Victim, and let us promise Him that we will make it bear fruit by works of genuine penance.

## VIII

### OUR ADORABLE VICTIM'S LOVE FOR THE WILL OF HIS FATHER FROM THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS INCARNATION

#### I

*Our Lord Himself teaches us that He is entirely  
a Victim of His Father's Will*

OUR sweet Saviour teaches us in the very words He addresses to His Father at the first moment of His Incarnation this great truth. Though we have already considered these holy words several times, there are two of them to which we have not as yet devoted our attention, and we must now try to fathom their meaning.

After saying that the old sacrifices and oblations did not please the Father, our Lord adds: "But a body Thou hast fitted to me" (*Corpus autem aptasti mihi*). Immediately afterwards He says again: "Sacrifices and holocausts for sin Thou wouldest not"; and then He adds:

“Then said I: Behold, I come: in the head of the book it is written of Me: that I should do Thy will, O God” (*In capite libri scriptum est de me, ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam*).

These words are a manifest revelation of the state and dispositions of our sweet Master throughout His life, a state and disposition of perpetual and absolute obedience to His heavenly Father. But let us go deeper into the meaning of these great and high words.

*Corpus autem aptasti mihi* (“A body hast Thou fitted unto Me”). These words, as well as all that He says at the same time in speaking to His Father, are taken from the Psalms. Our Lord had made prophets foretell His advent; everything connected with Him was predicted, even the words He was to use in Mary’s womb from the very beginning of His existence. They are to be found in Psalm xxxix, verses 7-9. Only in this passage, instead of the words “A body Thou hast fitted to Me” are found these, “Thou hast given Me perfect hearing.”<sup>1</sup>

According to the Fathers the apparent difference arises from two diverse expressions of the same thought.<sup>2</sup> According to St. Paul, our Lord says: “A body hast Thou fitted to

<sup>1</sup> *Aures autem perfecisti mihi* (Ps. xxxix. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius à Lapide, in Heb. x. 5.

Me." This, according to St. John Chrysostom, is the same as saying: "Thou hast willed, O Father, that I should be a perfect Victim, and to that end Thou hast prepared a body for Me to be the matter of the sacrifice."

In the Psalm, our Lord says: "Thou hast pierced ears for Me." But, according to the interpreters of Holy Scripture,<sup>1</sup> this is the same as saying: "Thou desirest Me, O Father, to have that disposition which is most essential to a victim, that is to say, a disposition of perfect readiness to hearken to Thy will, in order to execute it faithfully."

The words of the Psalm are sometimes translated: "Thou hast given Me perfect hearing" or "made My ears to hear well," sometimes by the *piercing of the ears*, which is a sign of perpetual servitude, but in either case the meaning is the same.<sup>2</sup> Our dear Victim is wholly devoted to the will and good pleasure of the Father, and He therefore repeats the words more than once for our benefit.

*In capite libri scriptum est de me: ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam* ("In the head of the

<sup>1</sup> Father Berthier, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Two readings are given in Cornelius à Lapide, *perfecisti*, as in the Vulgate, and *perforasti*. The French author prefers "perfect hearing" to "pierced ears," as the best rendering.

book it is written of Me : that I should do Thy will, O God"). How sweet are these words! What wonders do they reveal! There is a wonderful, a mysterious, an eternal book, wherein is written all that God expects of His rational creatures. All the work we have to do is written in it ; and on the day of judgement our actual life will be set over against this mysterious record, which has been put down beforehand. There we shall have to face all the good and bad deeds which make up our story. But in the head of this book is written what God expects of Jesus Christ, because He is our Head, our First Principle, our Pattern. This high Will of God the Father, acknowledged and praised in the joy of His soul by our dear Victim, is that of which He says : " In the head of the book it is written of Me : that I should do Thy will, O God."

Let us adore our Lord when He says these beautiful words, thus teaching us all that the fulfilment of God's will means. Let us be ready to enter into His divine dispositions towards this thrice holy will.

## II

*Our Lord's Dispositions towards His Father's  
Will*

In our divine Victim we may consider, praise, and give thanks for three main dispositions: these are Adoration, Love, and Self-surrender.

1. *Adoration*.—What is the Will of God? It is Truth, Wisdom, and Goodness. It is Truth, because it is never deceived, and deceives us never in what it demands of us. It is Wisdom, because it sets and directs all creatures in the ways that are most certain to attain their end. To it must be applied the beautiful words of Holy Scripture: “It reacheth therefore from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly.”<sup>1</sup> It is also all Love and Goodness, because it only desires and aims at the good of souls; it desires to procure them all kinds of graces in this world, and endless bliss in the next. Whoever obeys its guidance with docility may say: “All good things came to me together with it, and innumerable riches through its hands. It is an infinite treasure to men; which they that use

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom viii. 1.

become the friends of God, being commended for the gift of discipline.”<sup>1</sup>

Our divine and dear Victim Jesus, concealed in the womb of Holy Mary, sees clearly, with a more penetrating vision than that of the Seraphim in the bliss of heaven, the wonderful attributes of His Father’s Will ; and, filled with admiration, He humbles Himself in the deepest adoration. Oh, how perfect is the adoration of the Word incarnate ! How high is the worship with which He reverences the Father’s Will ! And how does this Will show itself on behalf of His holy Humanity to be nothing but Truth, Wisdom, and Goodness !

2. *Love*.—But this vision also arouses in the Sacred Heart of Jesus a love which is measureless (not that there is in it a succession of acts depending upon one another, as we appear now to assume ; but we have no other way of describing the marvellous operations of our adorable Victim’s soul). And this love whereby Jesus loves His Father’s Will is a “love stronger than death” ;<sup>2</sup> for, says St. Bernard, “it would rather lose life itself than the love

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom vii. 11 and 14.

<sup>2</sup> Cant. viii. 6.

of His Father's Will."<sup>1</sup> But He also loves this adorable Will as if it were His true life, knowing that, according to His Prophet's own words : " Life is in His good will."<sup>2</sup> And this is why He says at the moment of His Incarnation : " I come to do Thy will, O God, and Thy law is within My heart."<sup>3</sup>

3. *Self-surrender*.—He loves the divine Will, and surrenders Himself to it without reserve, and in a manner He loses Himself therein. He has a human will distinct from the divine will which is in Him as the Word, and is also in His Father ; but it is only His to immolate absolutely to His Father's will. This mystery He reveals to us very clearly shortly before His death. After saying : " If it be possible, O Father, remove this chalice from Me," He adds, " But yet not My will, but Thine be done."<sup>4</sup> Thus does He reveal to us the mystery of His absolute self-surrender to His Father's will ; but, at the outset, He surrenders Himself without reserve, and makes an entire, perfect, and absolute immolation of Himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Ad milites Templi*, cap. 13 ; *Patrol. Lat.*, CLXXXII, 939.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxix. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxxix. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxii. 42 ; Matt. xxvi. 39.

What a grand lesson ! how wonderful and admirable it is ! Let us adore and thank and praise our lovable and adorable sacrificial Victim, and let us implore Him to make us participate in His own perfect dispositions.

## III

*On the perfect Way in which Jesus fulfils  
His Father's Will*

Jesus fulfils and carries out His Father's will in the most perfect manner by way of perfect obedience. But how are we to prove the perfection of His obedience ? It is proved by the perfection of His free will. The freer Jesus was, the nobler was His obedience. But, since all was as perfect as possible in our Lord, as to the faculties of His soul, even from the very beginning of His incarnation, His free will was then of the most perfect kind. And therefore Isaias, in speaking of the oblation of Jesus at the first moment of His incarnation, says : "He was offered because it was His own will."<sup>1</sup> And our Lord Himself, in speaking of the fulness of His freedom, also says : "No man taketh My life away from Me : but I lay it down of Myself, and I have

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liii. 7.

power to lay it down : and I have power to take it up again.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, our Lord was free not to undergo all that He endured and suffered on our behalf. And St. Paul confirms this truth, when he says : “ Jesus having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.”<sup>2</sup>

And St. John Chrysostom adds this comment : “ These words mean that our Lord might have avoided all suffering, had He so willed ; for He had no need to suffer and be crucified, but He endured this torment for the love of us.”<sup>3</sup>

What St. Chrysostom says of the punishment of the Cross must also be said of Christ’s poverty and humiliations, and of all His toils and labours, and of death itself.

But, what is the chief determining motive that led our merciful Redeemer to accept, love, and prefer denudation, shame, and suffering ?

His Father’s good pleasure.

It is true that our Lord, in spite of the excellent and perfect freedom of His will, could not fail in the slightest degree in His respect for His Father’s commandments, and even for His wishes. That admits of no

<sup>1</sup> John x. 18.\*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Suarez, in III part. Thom., disp. xxxvii, § 2.

question. But could not He, who was the Son of God, have asked for some exemption? Does not He Himself show as much in the Garden of Olives when He says to St. Peter, who had drawn his sword to smite the high priest's servant: "Put up thy sword again into its place. . . . Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of angels?"<sup>1</sup>

But from the first moment of His earthly existence Jesus ever had His look fastened upon His heavenly Father, and He could always utter such beautiful words, such a fitting utterance for a Victim, as the following: "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. My meat is to do His will. The Father who sent Me, He gave Me commandment what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting. The things therefore that I speak; even as the Father said unto Me, so do I speak. For I do always the things that please Him."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, then, is He completely and for ever given over to the will and good pleasure of

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 52, 53.

<sup>2</sup> John v. 30; iv. 34; xii. 49, 50; viii. 29.

## 70 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

His holy and adorable Father. That will and good pleasure are all His joy. All seems good to Him, provided that He is able to correspond with the will and desires of His Father in everything. . . . O wonderful obedience ! O adorable submission ! O sweet and humble docility ! O Victim, whose immolation is the highest and most excellent of all humiliations ! O will of the creature swallowed up in that of the Creator ! O will of the Father entirely satisfied ! O will of the Son glorifying the Father with its wondrous homage ! And all this taking place in Mary's womb, so that the Apostle in contemplating it in all its mysterious beauty exclaims : "In the which will, we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,"<sup>1</sup> in the womb of the holy Virgin !

Let us abandon ourselves to feelings of admiration and gratitude and love, and let us make acts of holy rejoicing inspired by this truly incomparable and divine wonder, which fills heaven and earth everlastingly with rapture.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 10.

## IX

### THE UNION OF MARY WITH JESUS IN THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

#### I

##### *On the Mother of God*

How glorious is the title of “Mother of God!”

In the Holy Trinity there are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But, the Son becomes man in time, that is to say that in the same way as He possesses the divine nature from all eternity and to all eternity, so does He take our human nature in time, and He takes it for all eternity, and in this new condition He is one and the same Son of the Father, and one and the same Word, who became Jesus Christ in the Incarnation.

Now, this one and only Son of the Father is also the Son of Mary ; for the eternal Word is as truly man by the Incarnation as He is truly God. He has also really an earthly Mother as

well as a heavenly Father. And this adorable combination, if one may venture on such an expression, which we call by the name of Jesus Christ, is not only the Son of God the Father, He is also quite as much the Son of Mary. It is true that He is essentially the Son of God the Father, and Mary's Son only accidentally and by grace ; but when the divine work of the Incarnation is once accomplished, we acknowledge that Jesus has but one true Father and one true Mother, the eternal Father and lowly Mary.

And, just as the Father begets the Son with all the fulness of wisdom and knowledge which belongs to Him, not blindly (the mere suggestion of such a thing were a fearful blasphemy), but amidst the glories of the Saints, as the Holy Scripture tells us, that is to say, in His own infinite and essential light, so did Mary conceive Jesus perfectly well knowing the greatness of Him who was being conceived in her womb, and plainly perceiving her own greatness as Mother of God. The mission of the Angel proves this, and the conversation which is interchanged between the Blessed Virgin and the heavenly ambassador. This, too, is proved by Mary's consent which, according to the Fathers, was a determining condition of the

actual time of the Incarnation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word."

Then it is that the divine mystery takes place. The Father whose eternal generation of the Son ever gives Him an eternal and ineffable begetting, now, if earthly words may be used to express such lofty mysteries, begets the Son in the very womb of the Blessed Virgin; but here, O unspeakable mystery! He enters into co-operation with the holy Virgin. So that Mary receives by communication some of the infinite Virtue whereby the Father engenders His well-beloved Son, and through this Virtue she, too, engenders the eternal Word in His new condition of God-Man. And thus, it is not the Father only, nor Mary only, but the Father and Mary who give birth between them to that sweet Jesus who is their common Son. . . . How high and how great is Mary! She is *verily* the Mother of God!

But note what follows. This marvel has been wrought by the omnipotence of God. Now, in the work of God, all is wisdom, order, and harmony. Wherefore Mary, in view of her

future greatness as Mother of God, from the very beginning of her coming into being received corresponding graces. But what are these great graces ? They are beyond all description. They are something quite apart in the supernatural order. How can the incomprehensible gifts and favours bestowed by God on the highest Angels be compared with them ? . . . However grand these may be, yet such angelic favours are in a manner infinitely removed from the special and unparalleled grace granted to holy Mary. And why is this ? what is the reason of this difference ? It is that the grace given to Angels, even to the highest in the angelic rank, is a grace of *servants* of God, and the grace bestowed upon Mary is the grace of the *Mother* of God. O Mother, what eminence and greatness and singular holiness are thine ! for, thou art my Mother, too.

And, this pre-eminent grace, which is only surpassed by that of her own Son from which it is derived, Mary made to bear fruit within her ; for the grace she had received, however wonderful it was, was capable of increase and being made perfect by the Blessed Virgin's correspondence with it. And she corresponded therewith faithfully. Like the seed in the

Gospel, she bore a hundredfold, and even more. And thus the supernatural beauty of her soul, the treasures of grace accumulated within her, the good pleasure displayed towards the Blessed Virgin by the adorable Trinity, are mysteries whereof the knowledge is reserved for the happy blissful days of eternity in heaven.

O masterpiece of the right hand of the Most High! O miraculous Motherhood! O divine alliance between the Holy Trinity and Mary! O ineffable union between the Word incarnate and the holy Virgin! O world of heavenly beauties! O Mary! I come before thee, and I cast myself in rapture at thy feet, wishing to pay thee all the homage that is thy due; and, in my weakness I offer thee, if I may venture to do so, the very love of thine own Son for thee.

## II

*Mary is fully aware of what was taking place in her Virginal Womb during the nine Months she was bearing Jesus, our Victim.*

No sooner had Mary given her consent to the mystery of the Incarnation by saying to the Angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word,"

than she was divinely illuminated to see what was taking place in her virginal womb. She saw the quick and loving movement of Jesus towards His Father, an impulse that led Him to offer Himself as a Victim to His infinite majesty. She was the witness of His incomprehensible humiliations, His profound adoration, His loving prayers, His humble thanksgiving, and His ardent prayers and supplications for His Father's honour and glory and for the good of us all. She entered into the inmost Heart of her divine Son, and there she contemplated the wonderful beauty of its dispositions, its ardent zeal for the extension of the Father's kingdom throughout the world, and for the most perfect fulfilment of His adorable will, and for the world-wide hallowing of His name. And she saw how, to attain this end, Jesus was ready to endure every kind of toil and to suffer His painful Passion and the cruellest of deaths. . . . It is true that we cannot affirm that Mary then knew *all the circumstances* of her adorable Son's life and death. Some of the Gospel records<sup>1</sup> seem to show that for infinitely wise reasons in the providence of God certain circumstances were hidden from her. But nothing that was essen-

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 35 and 50.

tial to the mission of Jesus was unknown to her, according to the opinion of the holy Doctors. Therefore the holy Virgin was constantly deep in admiration and adoration of all the divine wonders. The Heart of our divine Victim was seen by her in all its heavenly beauty. What rapture and ecstasy did she experience! What flames of love were kindled in the heart of humble Mary not only by the contemplation of all these divine splendours, but by her clear view of her adorable Son's love for her ; for, according to the Fathers and Doctors, Jesus came into the world more for Mary's sake than for the sake of all the rest of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

What a life was that of our divine Mother —for she is truly our own Mother, and Jesus is only her first-born<sup>2</sup>—how altogether heavenly was her life during the nine months she bore the living Word in her womb ! What was outward life, what the external world, what were temporal circumstances to her ? No doubt she neglected not a single duty (for we shall see in our next meditation how she was able to immolate the sweetness of contemplation to charity) ; but when she was fulfilling

<sup>1</sup> See Suarez in III part. Thomæ, disp. 3, §§ 2 and 5. et disp. 18, § 4.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. i. 25.

the outward duties of charity or propriety, her mind and heart, and her whole soul, were attached to the centre of love, to our sweet Victim, her own dear Son. If we understand what is meant by our heart being where our treasure is,<sup>1</sup> then we know what the perpetual and uninterrupted state of union must have been between Jesus and His holy Mother, and this union must have ever been on the increase.

O incomparable marvel ! O truly delightful subject of meditation, wonder, adoration, praise, and imitation ! . . . How incalculably precious is the grace bestowed upon us by God in His goodness, when He permits us to enjoy so fair and charming a spectacle as that of Mary bearing Jesus, contemplating with all the clearness of divine illumination His adorable state and dispositions, losing herself in this wonderful vision, and ever casting herself in all lowness into the ocean of the love and grace of Jesus, the Beauty of heaven and earth !

Let us keep peace awhile, and honour with our silence, if we cannot with our speech, this high and inconceivable mystery !

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 21.

## III

*Jesus, our divine Victim, constantly draws His Holy Mother to Himself, and makes her participate in His own Dispositions and in His State of being the sacrificial Victim of His Father for the sake of Mankind*

Jesus came into the world for the salvation and sanctification of souls. Now, the salvation and sanctification of souls consists in the communication to them by our merciful Redeemer of His own dispositions, and of His condition of being a Victim.<sup>1</sup> The more a soul participates in this supernatural fulness, the more holy it is, the more is the Father glorified, and the more fully is it redeemed. We should always pray for such communication to be made to us in all abundance, and should consider the loss of it by our own fault as the greatest of all misfortunes.

Now, of all the souls whom Jesus came to sanctify, Mary is the dearest to His heart. Mary is His well-beloved. We have seen how, according to the holy Doctors, He had

<sup>1</sup> This truth is set forth in *Union with the Life of Jesus as Victim*, a book which is a kind of introduction to this work.

Mary in view in the work of His redemption in such a special way that He came into the world even more for her sake than for the sake of all the rest of mankind. Therefore Jesus communicated to His holy Mother more than to any other soul the grace of being a Victim, and this communication was made to her from all time. Mary in the Temple, from her mother's womb and in the glorious mystery of the Immaculate Conception<sup>1</sup> received this excellent grace, and ever grew towards perfection in this heavenly gift on account of her marvellous fidelity ; but this took place above all when Jesus Himself the perfect Victim and Sacrifice dwelt, as He did for nine months, close to His Mother's heart, which was the more holy and fitting altar for His sacrificial state. Then it was that above all He filled her with all the fulness of the spirit of sacrifice. He drew her into the fire of His holocaust, if we may so express it, and, in His character as Priest of the new covenant, He consecrated her afresh as with Himself a Victim of the Father. And Mary surrendered herself most lovingly to be a Victim of nought but adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and expiation along

<sup>1</sup> See further, Chap. XXI.

with Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Thus they made but one Victim consumed with love of the Father and with zeal for our souls. O union most high ! O spectacle worthy of the Holy Trinity ! Jesus ever communicates more and more of His fulness to Mary, and Mary receives ever more and more lovingly of this divine outpouring. She participates in an ever more and more perfect manner in the dispositions of Jesus. She desires to be all that He is for the honour of His Father and for us. As Jesus has to suffer in His Passion, she too desires to have hers, and she seems to us already to have some foreboding of this ; for, how is it possible for the Mother of such a Victim, of a Victim stamped already with the brand of immolation, by her clear vision of the fact, and of His acceptance of the sacrifice, to be the Mother of such a sacrificial Victim without having some feeling of His sorrowful condition ?

Such was Mary's union with Jesus as Victim, and thus she gives God the Father every kind

<sup>1</sup> *Dum ipsa Virgo grata habuisset Christum in utero, participabat et sentiebat cum Christo passiones et gaudia, amando proximum et dolendo de offensis. Etenim si omnes qui per Baptismum introeunt statum Christi, secundum Apostolum, in mortem sunt, et crucifiguntur vetus homo eorum : quanto magis Virgo cum Christo crucifixa est, in hora hujus conceptionis !*  
S. Bernard. Sen. III, p. 342 ; IV, p. 102.

of reverence and homage ; but there was another mystery, another degree of union between Jesus and His holy Mother. Mary was not only a Victim along with Jesus. She was also the Victim of Jesus Himself ; for, her dear and beloved Son was also her God, and this God incarnate deserved at the hands of His creatures every sort of honour and praise and thankfulness. But a day was to come when His creatures would misprize and contemn Him, and would inflict upon Him every sort of outrage and the most shameful death. Mary, with all her enlightenment, knew what the life and death of Jesus were to be. And this is why she was drawn towards Him by a special impulse of love, self-sacrifice, and affection, and offered herself to Him to be His Victim, His Victim of praise, thanksgiving, and expiation, the ever-faithful and constantly immolated Victim of His Sacred Heart.

Oh, what a fresh union with Jesus arose from Mary's special dispositions as a Victim ! Let us now adore this mystery ! Later on, we shall contemplate it anew at greater length ; but, since we now catch a glimpse of its grandeur, let us here pour forth all kinds of religious acts, particularly such as express our admiration and love.

# X

## THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

### I

*Mary's Departure for Elizabeth's House.—The Visitation is a Mystery of Immolation*

THE fire that consumed the victims of the first testament was a material fire. That which consumes Jesus, the great and, indeed, the truly unique Victim of God the Father, and all those who participate in His spirit of sacrifice, is an entirely spiritual fire, or rather a fire which is all divine; for this fire is the Holy Ghost Himself. It was through this adorable Spirit, says St. Paul, that Jesus Christ offered Himself to the Father as a spotless Victim;<sup>1</sup> and it is this that consumes in the flames of an eternal love all the elect, making them eternal sacrifices with Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. And it is this Spirit, according to St. Ambrose,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. II in *Luc.* cap. 1; *Patrol. Lat.*, XV, 1560.

who leads Mary to surrender and sacrifice the sweet consolations of her solitude in the mystery of the Visitation, thus becoming an admirable pattern of the spirit of immolation.

When the Archangel Gabriel withdrew, and Mary felt within her the presence of the eternal Word, the glorious Son of the Father, now incarnate within her chaste womb, what were the Blessed Virgin's feelings, and what was the most urgent need of her soul in all its rapture ?

It may be that sinners as we are we have experienced something of the sort at times in our fitful lives. It was after a fervent communion. By means of some sensible and wholly gratuitous grace we have experienced as it were a sense of the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom, of Him who is all the joy and comfort of our hearts ; and at such a moment, how strongly did we feel the need of solitude and silence ! How unwelcome would have been any word or request that required an answer ! How would it have annoyed us ! How much would it have cost us to be obliged to leave the church at once, and, before the spell had worn off, to go out into the streets and public places to take part in common talk,

or even in the most pleasant conversation, to have to be busy and occupied, even if what we had to do was a part of the duties of our vocation!

If it has ever been our lot to enjoy such happy moments of deep peace and great silence within, while the soul was wholly lost and swallowed up in the presence and almost felt action of the heavenly Guest, what is to be said of her who bore in her chaste womb her God who had now become her Son ? At the time of the Incarnation and many days afterwards, nay more, during all the ages of eternity, Mary would have needed a soundless solitude and immeasurable void spaces, or rather the unchanging peace of heaven. This silence and solitude and all this eternity would have been required for her to have been able to satisfy her infinite yearning for adoration and thanksgiving and praise, and for keeping still and dwelling dumb in her immense amazement at so wondrous a spectacle, the spectacle of the Eternal now become a babe and borne by herself in her immaculate womb ! This was the irresistible longing of her soul, her heart, and her whole being, and it was also her joy and ineffable bliss.

But love's flames are full of activity ; the

charity of Jesus is urgent.<sup>1</sup> He had come down from heaven, leaving as it were the Father's breast,<sup>2</sup> and giving up heaven's glory and rest, and He came down to our earth to bear all our infirmities, and to submit to all the needs of human nature. The spirit of sacrifice urged Him to every kind of trouble and toil and suffering. His holy Mother, the true and perfect image of Himself, could have no other dispositions than His. And thus she is no sooner in possession of her incomparable treasure than she immolates all her most lawful preferences and likings, and goes off into the mountains of Judæa with all haste. Thus runs the Gospel story :

“ And the angel answering said to her : The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age ; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren : because no word shall be impossible with God. And Mary said : Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14. *Charitas Christi urget me.*

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 28. *Exiri a Patre.*

And the Angel departed from her. And Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda. And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us practise recollection and make acts of admiration, praise, and love, inspired by the exquisite example of our Mother’s wonderful conduct. Next, let us ask ourselves whether an unruly love of our own peace and ease, a kind of sensuous enjoyment of our devotions and spiritual pleasures, does not sometimes lead us to neglect our duties to our neighbours in their spiritual and bodily needs.

## II

*Mary’s Arrival at Elizabeth’s House.—Jesus begins to reveal His Mother as the Dispenser of all His Graces*

Let us resume the sacred historian’s narrative :

“And Mary entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass : that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb.

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 35-40.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord. And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord . . ." etc.<sup>1</sup>

Plainly, as the Fathers observe, Mary here is seen to be the instrument, the minister, and, if the expression may be allowed, the mystical priest and dispenser of the grace of Jesus Christ. Mary's salutation is meant for Elizabeth, who is filled with the Holy Ghost, and for John, who is purified from the taint of original sin, and it operates like the sacramental words which impart grace to the recipients of the sacrament. Jesus is an immense ocean of all the graces the Most Holy Trinity intends to communicate to men, and Mary determines the outpouring of this ocean by her prayers and by means of the dispensatory power she has received as Mother of God. Since in virtue of

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 40-47.

this office she possesses Jesus, the ocean of goodness and mercy; she has also all the channels whereby this ocean irrigates the world, or rather she is herself the holy and wonderful channel of its outpouring.

Such is the teaching of all the Fathers. For the comfort and joy of our souls, let us hear what Catholic tradition has to tell of this truth, that Mary is the dispenser of all graces.<sup>1</sup>

St. Ephraem, the illustrious deacon: "By thee, O Mary, all the just and the humble of all the ages from Adam till the end of time have received and shall receive all honour, glory, and holiness. Thou alone art entirely immaculate, thou art full of grace, and all rejoice in thee."

St. Cyril of Alexandria, at the Council of Ephesus, where Mary was proclaimed the Mother of God: "O Mary, by thee the heavens

<sup>1</sup> Here is a summary of references on the point: St. Ephraem, III, p. 532, Ed. 1746.—St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily against Nestorius*.—Brev. Rom., Oct. Nat. B.V.M. (Sep. 15).—St. Jerome, *apud Contenson, Theol. mentis et cordis*, X, vi, 6.—St. Aug., *De Virginitate*, c. v et vi.—St. Bernard, *Serm. in Nat. B.V.M. de Aquæductu*, §§ 6, 7, 18, *Patrol. Lat.*, CLXXXIII, 440-448.—Brev. Rom., *in festo Auxil. Christ. B.V.M.* (May 24).—St. Bonaventure, *Speculum*, *lect. iii*, pp. 455, 457.—Albert. Magnus, XX, q. 147, et q. 164.—St. Anselm, *apud S. Bonavent.*, *Speculum*, *lect. i*, p. 455.—Richard a S. Laur., *De laudibus B.V.*, XI, ii, et IV.—St. Bernard. Senensis, *Oper.*, IV, p. 92.

rejoice, and Angels and Archangels are filled with joy, fiends are put to flight and man is restored to heaven. By thee, too, every being who is bewitched by the errors of idolatry is converted to the knowledge of the truth, and the faithful have received the happiness of holy Baptism, and throughout the world churches are built to the glory of God."

St. Jerome, the famous Doctor of the Latin Church : "In Jesus Christ, as in a Head, from whom the Church receives all supernatural power, is the fulness of grace, and the same fulness is found in Mary as in the mystical neck of the body of the Church, whereby she communicates it."

St. Augustine, the great Bishop of Hippo : "As long as we are in this world, we are in Mary's womb, as a child in its mother's womb, and she bears us in this manner until she brings us forth for heaven. But just as the child assimilates no food which is not digested by its mother, so do we receive no grace which Mary does not distribute in proportion to our needs."

St. Ildefonsus, Archbishop of Toledo, and the glory of Spain : "All the graces the Almighty has decreed to impart to men He wills to entrust to thy hands, O Mary !"

St. Peter Damian, Archbishop of Ravenna

and a Doctor of the Church : “In thy hands, O Mary, are all the tréasures of divine mercy.”

St. Bernard, the great servant of the Queen of heaven : “God has granted to Mary the fulness of all blessings. Let us then acknowledge that if there be any grace or hope of salvation in us, we owe these favours to Mary ; for this is the will of God, that everything should reach us through Mary.”

St. Bonaventure, the seraphic Doctor : “O Mary, thou art truly full of grace ! Nay, more, in thee doth grace superabound, and through thy superabundance doth every creature receive new life.”

St. Bernardine of Siena, who was so wonderfully devout towards Mary and her pure spouse St. Joseph : “Mary is the dispenser of all graces. Our salvation is truly in her hands. From the day she was raised to the honour of being Mother of God and conceived the Word in her womb, she acquired a kind of jurisdiction over the temporal procession of the Holy Ghost, that is to say, over the communication of every kind of grace to creatures, so that she freely distributes gifts to whom she will, and as she will.”

The witness of many other holy Doctors might be adduced ; Bossuet, the Bishop of

Meaux, thus sums up the truth we are considering, which so redounds to Mary's glory : " When God had once decreed to give us Jesus Christ through the Most Holy Virgin, the order was immutably fixed, for the gifts of God are without repentance. It is, and it ever will be true, that having once received through her the universal principle of grace, we shall go on receiving through her mediation all its various applications in all the different conditions of our Christian life."<sup>1</sup>

Here let us stay awhile and extol Jesus, who has bestowed so high an honour upon His holy Mother. Let us praise Him for having thus put us in such close and intimate relations with the Queen of love. This is the foundation of the life of union with Mary. Let us congratulate this merciful Mother, and stir ourselves to the greatest, the most loving, and the most childlike confidence in her goodness, and let us thank her for all the graces bestowed upon us through her maternal prodigality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sermon 3, *On the Conception of B.V.M.*, point 1 : Bourdaloue says : " Mary is God's coadjutor in the order of our salvation ; and as salvation began with her and through her consent to God's word, through her and her co-operation it must be fulfilled."—Sermon 2, *On the Assumption of B.V.M.*, part 2.

<sup>2</sup> More on this head may be found in the same writer's *De la Vie d'union avec Marie*.

## III

*Mary's Sojourn with Elizabeth.—The Virtues  
she exercises during this Visit*

It would be very hard to enumerate all the virtues exercised by the holy Virgin during her stay at Hebron, and to meditate upon each one of them separately ; for they make up a complete whole of the life of perfection. How sublime and sweet a spectacle have we here ! What single virtue would not have a claim upon our admiration ? Humility, simplicity, gentleness, charm, charity, prudence, modesty, mortification, patience, regularity, union with God and with Jesus, the surrender of self to Their guidance and providence, the pure love of Their adorable will, and so forth ; and a host of other wonders of grace and holiness we cannot even mention.

And therefore, owing to our ignorance, we shall confine ourselves to those virtues which are most prominent in this mystery, and to those which are most fundamental.

St. Ambrose, commenting on the Gospel of the Visitation, takes pleasure in admiring Mary's humility. Speaking to virgins, he observes : "Learn to know the humility of

your Example. She it is who goes to visit Elizabeth, she it is who takes the first step, and not only is she the first to pay her visit, she is the first to give her greeting. And all this is as it should be: the more pure a virgin is, the more humble she is. She knows what respect is due to her elders. Let her who makes a profession of chastity be always a mistress in humility. Humility is the root of piety, and it is also the rule of real knowledge. And note how, in this mystery, the superior is the one to make advances to her inferior for the good of that inferior: Mary comes to Elizabeth, and Jesus comes to John.”<sup>1</sup>

Mary’s humility comes out in the most excellent manner when, after saluting her cousin, she listens to the splendid praises bestowed upon her by the latter: “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. . . . And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.” What words are these! When did ever any human being hear such congratulations as these from one filled with the Holy Ghost? But, how does Mary answer? “My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit

<sup>1</sup> II, i, *in Luc.—Patrol. Lat.*, XV, 1560.

hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." What a reply was this to her cousin's speech ! It is as if she said : " Let us lift up our minds still higher, let us rise to the very source of all good. You contemplate in me these wonderful gifts and signal graces. But these gifts and graces are freely bestowed. God's goodness is their source, and to Him belongs the glory. He has wrought this marvel in me, because He hath condescended to look upon me ; but in truth, I am only His humble and unworthy handmaid. *Quia respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ.*"

These thoughts were worthy of the admiration and praise of Angels and men through all eternity ; they were thoughts that gave more honour to God and to their witness, gentle Jesus, than all the prayers and praises and sacrifices of the Old Law, and than all the acts of fervour and love of all the Saints of the New Law.

Another shining and striking virtue revealed in the same mystery is that of charity—charity in all its sweetest characteristics, amiability, simplicity, constancy, self-sacrifice, and attention to small needs and little things. Charity

and affection, says St. Ambrose in the passage already referred to, are what urge her on. These lead Mary to leave her house, and to go with all haste into the hill country. Charity, and sweet and strong affection are what keep her for three months at Hebron. And all this time, how many instances of true and holy affection does she display! Nothing is too small, nothing is common or contemptible in her sight. Whatever was required by her cousin's health and comfort, whatever contributed to the gladness of the other members of her family, or to the order and good management and cleanliness and conveniences of the household, all this was taken in hand and provided for by Mary. Without any loss of her maidenly modesty, heavenly reserve, matchless dignity, delightful simplicity, or rather, accompanying and adorning each of her acts with the exercise of these virtues, she looked after everything, she paid close attention to everything, and she scattered around her all the blessings of true charity, peace, sweetness, and mutual good-will, which is the sweetest sign of the presence and influence of God in human souls. Happy household! Blessed spirits! . . . And all this went on for three months!

Another virtue, to which we assign the third place, but which was nevertheless the source of the two others, and of all holy dispositions, filled the Angels with wonder. It was the union of Mary with Jesus. Outwardly, Mary was busy with all the demands of charity or propriety. She was really given up to waiting on her neighbour ; but, owing to a peculiar dispensation of God's goodness, such as was conferred upon her alone—at least nowhere else was it so pre-eminently and permanently manifested—her soul clove to its centre of love. In a sense, her ecstasy was unbroken. Adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and actual love cease not in Mary. Jesus was her constant attraction, and she yielded herself lovingly to His irresistible spell. Mary ever was reading the inmost depths of the Sacred Heart, and not an act ascended from the divine Victim within this sanctuary without being accompanied by a corresponding act on the part of His holy Mother.

Such was Mary's life at Hebron, and such was all the rest of her life. Outwardly, her work seems ordinary ; but inwardly, the perfection of the spirit which animated it was known to God alone.

Let us redouble our adoration, admiration, and love, and ask God to pardon our levity and

## 98 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

inconstancy, which make us so dull to the loveliness of such mysteries as these. Let us make such resolutions as we most need in order to bring our lives into harmony with that of our holy Mother.

## XI

### THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

#### I

##### *The Moment of Jesus' Birth*

How happy a moment it was for heaven and earth when our divine Redeemer was born! What a new era then begins! How many graces are poured down from the heavenly Father's heart upon the world inveterate in evil; for now Jesus is one of us, in our very midst, and He has His place amongst the innumerable hosts of mankind! What astounding condescension! How can we busy ourselves with the trifles and vanities of this world, when the Faith provides our minds and hearts with such delights?

Mary and Joseph had sought in vain on Christmas eve to find a shelter for the night. Refusals, and perhaps rough words, rewarded their inquiries. The night fell, and they had to leave Bethlehem for the country. Not far

from the inhospitable town was a cave hollowed out in the rock, and it was used to shelter live-stock. To this poor and comfortless place they betook themselves. The early hours of night dragged slowly on ; then, at last, came midnight. Mary, well knowing the prodigy that was about to happen, was praying, and with her prayed the humble and gentle Joseph. Mary's prayer grew more and more intimate. Her soul was at the same time prostrate at the feet of the Father in heaven and hidden in the heart of her divine Son. Her spiritual state is now raised higher than that of highest rapture ; it goes beyond even the most beatific vision of the Angels in heaven. It is a state of mind and heart, an ecstasy quite of an order apart. And then, at last comes the moment that outdoes all the ages, and even eternity itself, in glorifying the Father immeasurably and in bringing joy to our souls everlasting. Jesus is born of Mary's womb. As a bright beam of sunshine passes through pure crystal without affecting it, as Jesus Himself will one day arise gloriously from the tomb without breaking the seal or removing the stone,<sup>1</sup> thus, in His lowly birth, He miraculously passes through His

<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Hom.*, XXXVI, in *Evang.*—*Brev. Rom., Domin. in Albis, Lect. vii.*

Mother's immaculate womb, and lo! He is suddenly between her hands and heart! And nothing, either in the heavenly speech of the Angels above, or in the burning, ecstatic utterances of the Saints, nothing can ever express what took place in the soul of the Virgin Mary. O unrivalled rapture! O consuming love creating a life that is divine! O new degree of union between the Son and His Mother! Let us be recollected and adore. And the Evangelist says with a noble simplicity, which seems impregnated with the divine calmness of Jesus and His holy Mother: "And Mary wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger."

Mary falls again into adoration: she is once more in an ecstasy, and in this ecstasy one wonder of grace succeeds another. Joseph joins in the prayer and adoration and homage and love of his holy Spouse. The shepherds soon arrive, and then the three Kings. They all find the Mother prostrate at her Infant's feet, and all of them, like Joseph, join with her, that their prayer and worship and offerings may be worthy of Him who rests on the straw and reigns higher than the heavens.

Let us, too, draw near with Mary, and through Mary, and let us adore and praise and

give thanks and love. . . . O how wonderful are the mysteries of our Faith! What exquisite spectacles are afforded by our holy beliefs! O foretaste of the pleasure of our heavenly fatherland!

## II

*Jesus' Crib is an Altar.—How He therein shows Himself as Priest and Victim*

In His lowly and poor Crib, the new-born Jesus offers Himself to His heavenly Father as a Victim. He had done this at the first moment of His Incarnation, and during the nine months in which He mysteriously abode in His Mother's womb, and He will do so later on the fortieth day of His life on earth ; but there are mysteries in which this oblation of Himself is plainly revealed to us. And this is what happened at the time of His birth, according to the great Pope Benedict XIV in his commentary on the following words of St. Paul: " Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith: Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not. . . . Then said I: Behold I come."<sup>1</sup> The words "when He cometh into the world "

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 5-7.

mean, according to the illustrious Pope, the birth in time of the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

And this is why the Church ventures to give utterance to the feelings of the Angels who chanted their Christmas hymn when Christ was born, for we find the following words in one of her Christmas antiphons :<sup>2</sup> "When our Lord was born, the choir of Angels sang: Salvation to our God who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb." By the Lamb is here signified Jesus the Victim.

Thus, the Crib is the first visible altar of our divine Redeemer. On these rough planks, in a little straw which apparently had to be won after justling with the animals, at dead of night, Jesus the true and only Priest of God the Father offers Him the true and only Sacrifice worthy of His infinite majesty. His littleness, His weakness, the infirmities and failings of the human nature He has taken upon Himself, are in no way detrimental to the uplifting of His mind and the aspirations of His heart; for His mind is free. Never will it be fuller of light, not even on Thabor, not even in the glories of the resurrection; and His heart is as much on fire with the love of

<sup>1</sup> *De sacrificio Missæ*, II, xi, § 5.

<sup>2</sup> Feast of the Circumcision, Antiphon of Nocturn iii.

His Father and of the salvation of souls as it will be when the time comes for the institution of the Eucharist. Thus does He ascend to the Father in an immeasurable love, rendering to Him in this uplifting all the love and homage which are His due. The sacrifice thus offered is perfect, whether on account of the personal worth of the Priest who offers it, or else because of the excellence of the Victim that is offered. The Priest who offers is the Son of God, not an adopted Son, but the true and only Son of God ; and He is, indeed, the sole and single Priest of this unparalleled sacrifice. And the Victim offered is also the Son of God, not a son of His grace and goodness, such as we ourselves are, but His own and only Son by essence and nature, now clothed with mortal flesh.

What homage paid to the Father ! What incomparable excellence in the adoration and praise and thanksgiving and other acts of worship proceeding from such a Priest and Victim and Son ! What an altar, and how far surpassing in beauty and value the golden altar of the Old Testament was the Crib wherein a new-born Babe rests upon a little straw ! What hymns and canticles and sighs were those that arose from the Heart of Jesus, and how they were

mingled with His wailing and tears! Now the Father is satisfied, and He looks down upon the earth, which originally lay under a curse, with loving eyes. The days of reconciliation have come. Angels may now chant their joyful strain : "Glory to God in the highest : and on earth peace to men of good will."

Let us adore this Priest, this Offerer of sacrifice who, in His littleness as a new-born Babe, achieves such wonders. Let us adore this Victim in our stead before the Father, for we too are intended to be victims, but victims of the just wrath of an angry Judge. Let us give thanks, praise, and exalt our sweet Saviour and Redeemer, the dear Infant who lies in the Crib.

### III

#### *Jesus, in His Crib-Altar, is mainly a Victim of Expiation*

Everything proclaims Jesus the Victim of expiation, the poor bare cave, the crib, the straw, the swaddling clothes, the cold, and all the other sufferings and humiliations which accompany and distinguish the mystery of His birth. St. John says : "All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and

the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life."<sup>1</sup> Jesus comes to expiate the sins of the concupiscence of the flesh by His sufferings, the sins of cupidity (signified by the concupiscence of the eyes) by His utter poverty, and the pride of life by His humiliations. Humiliation lies at the root of all the mysteries of our adorable Victim ; and we shall consider this truth later on. Our next meditation will be upon Jesus' poverty. Let us now reflect awhile upon the sufferings of our sweet Saviour : these are, strictly speaking, the most striking characteristic of a Victim of expiation.

Those writers who have dealt with our Lord's sufferings in the crib say that they went beyond all we can imagine. Here we have not to do with moral sufferings arising from the thought of the sins of the world, but rather with bodily sufferings. The hard bed for the tender body, being bound like a prisoner in the swaddling clothes of infancy, the bitter cold of the night, all these things and others also, which were revealed to the Saints, drew floods of tears from their eyes, and they tell us that what the holy Child of Bethlehem had to suffer is indescribable.

In general, the two chief causes of these sufferings, in addition to the express will of

<sup>1</sup> 1 John ii. 16.

our sweet Victim, are considered to be the following :

1. The perfect understanding of the Infant Jesus, which made Him sensible of the least discomforts just because He was conscious of them. " Except to Him," says Faber, " never was it given to any child to feel the fulness of a child's capacity for pain, or of childhood's peculiar pain from its delicacy and sensitiveness ; because the child's powers of mind are dormant, and perhaps two-thirds of bodily pain are due to the intervention of the mind. . . . In our Lord's case the full use of reason and complete maturity of soul were superadded to the weak impressionableness and delicate frame of childhood." <sup>1</sup>

2. The second cause of our dear Redeemer's sufferings as He lay upon the straw at Bethlehem exposed to the midnight cold is the perfection of His infant body. The more perfect a being is the more is it hurt by any cause of suffering and pain, for its tenderness is more exquisite, and its susceptibility all the greater. Animals suffer less than men, just because their bodies are less perfect than those of men. Now, among all men Jesus, whose adorable body was formed of the pure blood received

<sup>1</sup> Faber, *Bethlehem*, chap. vii.

from Mary, was as to His body the most perfect of the children of Adam, and therefore the most sensible of the discomforts of life, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and weariness.<sup>1</sup>

Thus are the sufferings of the holy Child explained.

Let us now try to point out another and a higher and a deeper cause. Probably we have read of it somewhere, though we have forgotten the author's name.

Jesus came into the world mainly in order to be a Victim, and, in the circumstances in which He found our fallen human nature, He could only be a Victim of expiation. He was not only a Victim of adoration, of supplication, and of thanksgiving, as He would have been in case man had not fallen, supposing Him still to have become incarnate ; but He was a Victim of expiation for the sins of all men.

But we know that in the designs of God the Father revealed to us by St. Paul, and confirmed by the very circumstances of our Lord's life and death, that our Lord had to expiate not only by interior acts of worship, but also, and essentially, by suffering which was outward.

<sup>1</sup> Faber, *Bethlehem*, ch. vii—Thomas de Jesus, *Sufferings*, viith.

Hence it follows that when Jesus came into the world, He received from His Father and from the Holy Ghost a body *meant* to suffer, a body *peculiarly adapted* to suffering, a body which was, indeed, *made for suffering*. If we throw a stone into the fire, it is not consumed or reduced to ashes : why ? Because it is not fit for burning. If, however, we put a little wood into the fire, it is soon burnt up, because wood is fit for burning. Well, our sweet and dear Victim was cast by His Father's will into the burning fire of expiation and suffering, and because He offered no impediment to the action of the devouring fire, but on the contrary in all respects, both in body and soul, He was marvellously adapted for the burning, there is no extreme of suffering, no limit of anguish of soul or body, which He did not undergo.

And the Father made use of various means to transform Jesus into a Victim of perfect expiation in the various mysteries, choosing the cold of night as the means in the mystery of Bethlehem.

Thus the Crib at Bethlehem already anticipates the Cross of Calvary.

And it is to win our love, it is for the salvation of our souls and to give us a share in the eternal glory and happiness of heaven, that

## 110 JESUS CHRIST, PRIEST AND VICTIM

Jesus from the very beginning of His mortal life accepts at the hand of His heavenly Father and imposes upon Himself a life of pain and suffering and of every sort of affliction. Oh, when shall we be moved by all His love to return our dear Victim love for love ?

## XII

### THE POVERTY OF THE HOLY CHILD

#### I

##### *The Cause and Motive of the Poverty of the Divine Infant in the Manger at Bethlehem*

OUR Lord has paid the highest honour to the virtue of poverty. This is the most striking feature of the first of His visible mysteries, His birth in the cave of Bethlehem ; and to this He ascribes the first place among the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> (In saying, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” He seems to show that whoever despises transitory goods for the love of God already in a manner possesses goods which are eternal.) Poverty, too, was pointed out by our divine Lord as the foundation of the evangelical life to the “multitudes that followed Him.” He says to them, “So likewise every one of you

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 3.

that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be My disciple.”<sup>1</sup> And this was well understood by the Apostles, for St. Peter, speaking on behalf of them all, thus testifies: “Behold, we have left all things, and have followed Thee.”<sup>2</sup>

Poverty has always been well beloved by our lowly and gentle Victim. The Crib, Nazareth, Egypt, the days of His public Life, the Cross, the Tomb, the adorable Sacrament in the tabernacle, all these speak of it with wonderful eloquence. And Jesus appears Himself to reveal the truth that distinguishes His human life in the following words: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.”<sup>3</sup>

But what was the motive that determined our divine Redeemer to give the preference to human poverty as the constant companion of His life on earth? This motive lay in the fact of His being a Victim, and a Victim of expiation.

Man, by a sort of sacrilege, had abused the gifts he had received from God. Instead of employing them to His honour and glory, and to rise to God by means of gratitude and love,

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiv. 33.    <sup>2</sup> Matt. xix. 27.    <sup>3</sup> Luke ix. 58.

man had used these goods for his own pleasure and glory. He possessed and loved them as if they were his happiness and his sole end. And thus, to use the words of Scripture, “the creatures of God were turned to an abomination, and a temptation to the souls of men, and a snare to the feet of the unwise.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore man had to be brought back from his perverse wanderings, and the wrong done to the Creator had to be expiated.

Hence, our sweet and merciful Victim appeared at Bethlehem in such poverty and denudation, and thus it was to be all the rest of His life on earth.

But note the consequence of this mystery of Love. Jesus the true Victim of expiation, became so in a manner both wonderful and extraordinary. He expiated our sins by acting in our stead. How strange a proceeding for a God! . . . Now, what followed? The fact that, in taking upon Himself the sins of all men, and in particular the sin of avarice, the unruly love of the goods of this world, He had to expiate them Himself in His own flesh, and in such an external manner as to signify the penalty deserved by such sins. But, what is

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom xiv. 11.

the punishment specially due to the excessive and disorderly love of riches ? Is it not plainly the loss of such riches, that is to say, poverty and destitution ? On the other hand, the sinner is always ready to look down upon the blessings of grace ; and then, what better penalty can be inflicted upon him for the wrong he has done to his Creator than to take away from him even natural blessings which flow from God ? And therefore St. Gregory the Great observes that devils, who are the most miserable and criminal of sinners, possess nothing in this world.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus, our reparatory Victim, puts Himself in the place of sinners, nay more, St. Paul<sup>2</sup> teaches us that He looks upon Himself as if He were sin ; and this is signified by the utter poverty with which He is surrounded at His birth, and with which all the rest of His life is distinguished.

Let us deeply abase ourselves : let us bewail our sins, especially such as have brought poverty and destitution upon our sweet Victim ; and let us prepare to welcome the example He

<sup>1</sup> See *Homil. XXXII in Evang.*—Brev. Rom., *Lectio off. unius Martyris*, 2<sup>o</sup> loco.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21.

gives us of detachment from the things of earth by contemplating Him in His state of poverty in the manger of Bethlehem.

## II

*The Marks of Poverty in the Holy Child in  
the Manger at Bethlehem*

The poverty of our adorable Victim seems to bear four *chief* marks : (1) It is *voluntary* ; (2) it is *all-embracing* ; (3) it is *accompanied with suffering* ; (4) it is *full of ignominy*.

1. It is *voluntary*.—Jesus, being God as well as man, possessed all things, all that is in heaven and all that is on earth, and all that is to be found in the universe. It would have been fitting for Him to be rich in this world beyond the wealth of any king. But this was not His will. “Jesus Christ,” says St. Paul, “being rich became poor for your sakes ; that through His poverty you might become rich.”<sup>1</sup> When the Angel announces to the shepherds of Bethlehem the birth of the Holy Child and gives them a sign of the new-born Babe, he says : “And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 9.

clothes, and laid in a manger.”<sup>1</sup> O immense and entrancing mystery ! “He was offered because it was His own will ;”<sup>2</sup> He was poor because such was His will, and it was His love for us that brought Him down to such a state of destitution and misery !

2. It is *all-embracing*.—Here is a cave hollowed out in the rock, a manger, a little straw for the live-stock ; what could be more poverty-stricken ? And then, this cave and crib and straw are not His nor Mary’s nor His foster-father’s, nor do they belong to any of His relations. These poor things rather belong, if one may say so, to the dumb animals than to Him. The cave is their shelter. Thither they resort, and there they are at home ; the crib is their manger, and no one thinks of disputing their claim to use it ; the straw is their food, and doubtless no one had ever thought of depriving them of it. O overwhelming spectacle ! O Jesus ! O Love ! . . . And how is this birthplace of the King of heaven furnished ? . . . what kind of baby-clothes are provided for the new-born Infant ? Nothing but a few swaddling clothes. But is there any lack of them ? Is Mary going to be taken

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. liii. 7.

by surprise? Is not the mere question an insult to the feelings of such a Mother? No; it may be reasonably inferred that the very swaddling clothes would not have sufficed to cover all the body of the Holy Child, and that the reeking breath of the animals was needed to warm the feet of Jesus. Neither His holy Mother nor St. Joseph were taken by surprise, though they had no cradle. They were not unaware of the exact time of the birth of the Son of God; but both of them lay under the mysterious and mighty spell of the divine Victim. Jesus hidden in the darkness of His Mother's womb was controlling every one of their thoughts and feelings and acts; and Mary had only a few swaddling clothes, and Joseph was at Bethlehem without a cradle, though he would have desired to provide one of the purest gold, inlaid with the most precious gems throughout.

Everything was lacking in the cold stable; it was more than poverty, it was destitution of the most unmitigated kind. We may well believe that the presents of the royal Magi were bestowed upon the poor or used for the Temple service; but of these rich gifts nothing was left for the Holy Family. And this is proved by the fact that forty days after-

wards, when the Holy Child was carried to Jerusalem, Joseph could not buy a lamb, but merely made the offering of the poor: two young pigeons.

3. It is *accompanied with suffering*.—This is the case because our dear Victim is not only poor but destitute. To possess nothing in the world is neither painful nor provoking, if destitution be not felt. Let the religious who have taken vows of poverty not forget this! Their vows are only illusory and a mockery in the sight of God to whom they were made, unless the heart, set free from all attachment to this world's goods, be content with poverty and destitution, either forced or voluntary. What a Pattern of poverty and destitution we have in the Holy Child of Bethlehem! The freezing cave, the scanty swaddling clothes, the keen piercing wind searching every corner of the poor barn, all speaks to us of privation and suffering. May the poverty of God, the subject of our adoration, be also something we fervently desire! . . . What substantial spiritual riches are to be found in one who is of the true poor of Jesus Christ!

4. It is *full of ignominy*.—Poverty is sometimes a glorious thing. It is so to those who

have left the world and the things of the world for life in a religious community. Even the world admires such a sacrifice, and it is right in doing so. But the poverty of our God is far from being a matter of glory and honour. If we would form some idea of the deep ignominy and extreme humiliation that surround His destitute condition, let us simply ask ourselves: Should I like it to be said of me, that I was born in a stable, that my mother was rebuffed by everyone and forced to withdraw to a place used for animals, and that after my birth she wrapped me in a few wretched swaddling clothes and put me to sleep in the straw of a manger, as she could afford nothing better? . . .

Now, this is what took place at Bethlehem; and the Mother of the Child was the Queen of heaven, and the new-born Babe was the Eternal, the Infinite, the Almighty, God Himself! . . .

### III

#### *Our Duty as to the Poverty of the Holy Child Jesus*

These are the things we owe: *adoration—gratitude—love.*

1. *Adoration*.—The Angel said to the shepherds : “ And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.”<sup>1</sup> And the lowly shepherds came, and they were not scandalized by all the lowliness and destitution, and they adored Jesus in His littleness and weakness and poverty. Then came the Kings. They brought with them costly and rich presents. The extraordinary indifference of the priests of Jerusalem did not turn them aside from their pious intention. They reached the stable ; nor were they scandalized by the sight of the place with its crib, nor by the straw and the swaddling clothes and all the lowliness. “ And falling down they adored Him :” such are the words of the Evangelist. The shepherds of Bethlehem and the Kings of the East were of those whom our Lord will one day glorify when He says : “ Blessed is he whosoever shall not be scandalized in Me.”<sup>2</sup>

But can Jesus be a subject of scandal ? St. Paul declares that He can. He writes to the Corinthians : “ Christ crucified is unto the Jews a stumblingblock [or scandal] and unto the Gentiles foolishness.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus the Infant, Jesus in His poverty, Jesus born in a crib, is a

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. i. 23.

stumblingblock and foolishness to some of our own time and of all times, to those who are imbued with hateful worldliness of spirit, who can only appreciate what has an appearance of greatness and power. Let us beware of this fatal spirit which borders upon that of heresy. Let us adore our God in strong and simple faith, adore Him in the crib, in His poverty and wretchedness, if we may so describe it, in His denudation and in all His lowliness and ignominy, because our Jesus in the lowliness of Bethlehem as well as upon the Cross of Calvary is in reality the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

2. *Gratitude.*—It is this adorable and omnipotent poverty that has mercifully broken the bonds that bound us as slaves to the perishable things of this world ; this, too, has won us the inestimable blessings of grace. Through it outward poverty in the members of Jesus Christ has become an object of reverence in the Church of Christ, so that numbers of Christians have poured forth alms in abundance into the hands of the poor, and sacrificed themselves and even their lives on behalf of the destitute. This it is that has led to the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 24.

founding of hospitals and institutions of charity. It is also the consolation of those who are received in such shelters. It is the comfort of the faithful in times of persecution, when they are robbed by human malignity of their temporal belongings. It is even the strength of the Holy See when it has to suffer unjust and sacrilegious spoliation at the hands of its enemies. Then the crib in its bareness and extreme poverty comes to the mind of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and the Pope in his patience feels less bitterly the wrongs and treachery of men.<sup>1</sup> Once more it is the poverty of our adorable Victim that has founded the vast number of religious congregations, from those of the desert and the Sacred College of the Apostles and of the early Christians down to the venerable corporations of our own days.

How many blessings have come down to us from the poverty of Jesus! What gratitude do we owe to the holy Child!

3. *Love*.—We owe Him also our love, a tender and constant love leading us to imitate

<sup>1</sup> Was it not on this account, quite as much as to save the Relic from impious hands, that Pope Pius IX took away from St. Mary Major and had enshrined in his own chapel in the Vatican our Lord's Crib, which is not merely a copy, but the very Crib of Bethlehem with the same straw in it as that on which the Holy Child lay?

Him. What St. Peter says of the Passion and sufferings of our Lord, we, too, may say of His crib and His poverty : "Christ also left you an example that you should follow in His steps."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, we cannot be of the number of His disciples, if poverty is not dear to us. Like charity, it is a sign that we are His.<sup>2</sup> Let us, then, love this beautiful virtue, whether as an inward state or as an outward condition. If riches flow in upon us, let us not set our hearts upon them ;<sup>3</sup> and if the ever lovable and adorable will of divine Providence is that we should be born and live in poverty, let us be of good cheer ; for in this lowly state we find a more perfect likeness to our good Master and Saviour, who had not where to lay His head, and it gives us a greater readiness to work out our salvation and to win eternal blessings. Did not our Lord Himself exclaim : " How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"<sup>4</sup>

Let us examine our own dispositions as we kneel by the Crib. Let us cut off all those affections that do not correspond with the spirit of this sweet mystery. Let us become truly

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xiv. 33 ; John xiii. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxi. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Mark x. 23.

poor within, and, in our outward lives, let us shrink from all that runs counter to the state of our divine Victim. It may be that our social position demands certain externals; but let there be no luxury, no affectation of appearances, no excess, however common they may be nowadays, for they hurt the Holy Child and inflict hardship on the poor, who are His friends and His first adorers. Let us not depart without asking His holy Mother for the grace to love nothing but the true riches.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Si vere divites esse cupitis, veras diritias amate.* St. Gregory in Brev. Rom., *Dominic. Sexages. Hom. et Antiph.*

## XIII

### SOME SPECIAL CONDITIONS OF OUR DIVINE VICTIM AT BETHLEHEM

#### I

##### *The State of Littleness in the Holy Child*

ST. PAUL compares Adam and our Lord in these words: “The first man was of the earth, earthly: the second man, from heaven, heavenly.”<sup>1</sup> The first man in the order of time is Adam, the second is our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, in what condition was the first man made and established? for he was earthly. His state and condition from the moment of his creation were greatness, honour, strength, and glory. Adam never knew the infirmities and needs of the littleness of infancy. He appeared on the evening of the sixth day of creation as the king and lord of creation. On his features he bore the imprint of the very majesty of God. “God created man of the earth; and made him after His own image.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 47.

And He turned him into it again ; and clothed him with strength according to Himself. He gave him the number of his days and time, and gave him power over all things that are upon the earth. He put the fear of him upon all flesh : and he had dominion over beasts and fowls.”<sup>1</sup> Such was the glorious condition of our first father in the paradise of all delights.

But, if Adam received heavenly gifts in such abundance, though he was of the earth, earthly (*primus homo de terra terrenus*), what will be the worth and beauty and greatness of Him who came down from heaven, and who is not only a creature of God but the Son of God (*secundus homo de cælo cælestis*) ? Clearly all the glory and honour God is able to bestow must belong to such an One. Thus, at any rate, we should naturally expect His life amongst men to be. He will betray none of the infirmities and weaknesses of mankind, but be marked solely by strength, nobility, greatness, power, and all other glories combined.

O God ! how different are Thy thoughts from those of men ! Exactly the opposite is what actually took place. The heavenly man, He who was not only great but greatness per-

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. xvii. 1-4.

sonified, came down into the world, and the hour was midnight ; the place was a poor cave, and He was a little child. Thus, too, His prophet had foretold : “A *Child* is born to us.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, too, was He pointed out by the Angels to the lowly shepherds of Bethlehem : “And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.”<sup>2</sup> What an overwhelming mystery for our pride of reason ! And note well that none of the lowly circumstances surrounding ordinary infants is spared Him. He looks as if He were lifeless, so motionless does He lie ; nay more, to show the depth of His humiliation, He puts in the mouth of His prophet a word which, in any other mouth, would have appeared to be an insult and a blasphemy ; for He says of Himself : “I am a worm, and no man.”<sup>3</sup> Alas ! when has ever such deep abasement been seen in any other ? and who could ever have imagined that the eternal Word, in becoming man in order to be the King and Head of the human race, would begin with being a new-born infant and the creature of an hour, living an apparently hazardous life subject to all sorts of accidents, lying in swaddling clothes on a little

<sup>1</sup> Isa. ix. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxi. 7.

straw in a manger, in the bitter midnight cold, between an ox and an ass ? *Vermis et non homo!* (More like a worm than a man !)

The Psalmist says : *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis* ("Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised"). St. Bernard modifies the passage in this fashion : *Parvus Dominus et amabilis nimis* ("Lowly is the Lord, and exceedingly to be loved"). Yes, beloved beyond all we shall ever be able to conceive, even in heaven itself. Love it is that urges Him, love it is that makes Him so lowly and so little, and love it is that turns Him into a Victim for us. And, of a truth, since love transformed Him into a Victim for us, He had thus to humble Himself to expiate our incurable pride. This also had to take place for the greater glory of His Father ; for appearing thus Incarnate amidst His own creation, and showing Himself so little and so lowly, He gives the Father far more honour and glory than He would have done by the most eloquent of spoken praises.

What lessons may we draw from His wonderful lowness of state ! *Parvulus natus est nobis* : Unto us a Child is born to be our

Example and Ruler, and Victim, and Saviour !  
Let us adore Him and give Him thanks, and  
let us try to be like Him, and let Him ever be  
loved by us through all eternity.

## II

*The State of Dependence in the Holy Child*

It is of faith that the little Child in the Crib is the King and Lord of the world. He is its Arbiter and Judge. From the very beginning of His life in His holy Mother's womb "all power was given Him both in heaven and on earth";<sup>1</sup> for, as He says in the second Psalm : "The Lord"—thus does He designate His heavenly Father, to whom He is inferior as touching His manhood—"hath said to Me : Thou art My Son, this day have *I begotten Thee*. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for Thy possession."<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Child of Bethlehem already bears upon His robe and on His flesh, according to the well-beloved disciple, the glorious inscription : "King of kings and Lord of lords."<sup>3</sup>

Alas ! would one think it, judging by appearances ? In this world none is more

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. ii. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Apoc. xix. 16.

dependent than He. He depends upon the will of all about Him, and in a manner depends on irrational creatures and things inanimate. Before the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, He made it appear, so far as the strict obedience of His foster-father and the Blessed Virgin were concerned, as if He depended upon the Emperor Augustus. Whatever the motive of the imperial commands may have been, what was Augustus compared with the Holy Child borne in the Blessed Virgin's womb ? Nevertheless, Jesus shows His obedience and submissiveness, and comes to Bethlehem ; and when His birth was made known, His wonderful name is enrolled in the public registers as if it were that of a simple subject of the Roman Emperor.

When they reached Bethlehem, He willed to depend upon the humour of its inhabitants ; and because they were not well disposed towards Him, He was born in a poor manger, and laid in a little straw.

He depends upon His holy Mother, and this is one of His deepest and sweetest joys ; but the Church teaches that His Incarnation, even in the Blessed Virgin's womb, is a humiliation ; for holy Mary remains a simple creature in spite of her ineffable privileges and glories,

and the Child she brings forth to the light of day is her Creator and her God. But He willed to depend upon His sweet Mother in an almost absolute manner.<sup>1</sup> He required her devotion and care, the milk of her maiden bosom, and the constant work of her hands ; He needed her arms to carry Him into Egypt when escaping from the cruelty of Herod ; and the whole of His hidden life is summed up in these few words, which also refer to St. Joseph : “ He was subject unto them.”<sup>2</sup>

St. Joseph, too, held the eternal Word in dependence upon him. This also was one of the joys of the Holy Child of Bethlehem and Nazareth ; it was also one of His humiliations.

Nor is this all ; in the stable at Bethlehem our sweet Victim in a manner depended upon dumb irrational animals and lifeless things.

Was He not, indeed, dependent upon the two animals which happened to be in the stable, and upon their patience in waiting there and warming His infant feet with their breath ? Did not the winter cold affect His tender limbs ? We have already seen how this was one of the causes of His most painful suffer-

<sup>1</sup> *Non horruisti Virginis uterum.*

<sup>2</sup> Luke ii. 51.

ings. Thus, He was really dependent upon the cold. And the night-wind blowing on His face was a further source of pain. Thus did He depend upon the vicissitudes of the bitter winter weather.

What mysteries are contained in these apparently common details, and how strange a subversion ! Says the Holy Ghost : "Thou by Thy Wisdom" (*i.e.*, by the Word Himself) "hast appointed man, that he should have dominion over the creature that was made by Thee."<sup>1</sup> And now this almighty Word becomes man by His Incarnation. He is the typical man. The first man was only a rough sketch of what He was to be when He appeared in our midst.<sup>2</sup> And nevertheless, instead of ruling, He submits ; instead of issuing orders, He receives them from His creatures ; instead of showing Himself in that absolute independence which is essentially His, He is dependent upon everyone and, in a manner, upon everything.

What a lesson for us with our repugnance to discomfort of all kinds ! Prostrate before the Holy Child wrapped in swaddling clothes, at

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom ix.1-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Adam, qui est forma futuri.* Rom. v. 14.

the feet of the sweet Victim who now comes to expiate our extraordinary love of independence and unrestraint, let us seriously examine our own consciences. Perhaps our love of liberty and aversion to discomfort and contrariety, our unruly desire for independence, perhaps this singular defect, which so easily wears an appearance of proud virtue, is our dominant failing. Let us examine ourselves calmly and impartially in the presence of the Crib, considering our outward acts and inward tendencies one by one, and make such reformation as we need ; otherwise we shall have no part in the spirit of the sweet and lowly Victim of Bethlehem.

### III

#### *The State of Helplessness of the Holy Child*

In the Old Testament, when the victim was about to be slain, it was bound with cords or bands so that it might not be able to offer any resistance. The death-stroke was the result of having to submit to force. It is not thus with our divine Victim. It is written that Jesus was bound during His Passion.<sup>1</sup> But the strongest bonds were not those tied by men. There are others spoken of by Jesus through

<sup>1</sup> John xviii. 24.

the mouth of the Prophet, who says: "I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love."<sup>1</sup> These bonds and chains were borne by our divine Redeemer not only during His Passion, but throughout His whole life. When He speaks of the cords of Adam and the bands of love, He points to His Incarnation,<sup>2</sup> and to the extraordinary helplessness to which He condemned Himself when He became man; and these are bands of love because He took them upon Himself for the love of us, wishing to comfort us in our helplessness, and thus to exhort us to love all that brings us to that nothingness which is really our due.

Let us consider all the helplessness to which Jesus subjected Himself in the Crib.

Little infants have to undergo great disabilities. They have intelligence, but it is unexercised; reason, but it is confined by the infirmity of their condition; will, but it is powerless and as it were annihilated; and if certain acts are not purely instinctive, yet they are unpremeditated and destitute of all moral value. And for this reason their external and visible condition is a great humiliation. Jesus condescended to so lowly a state as this, and chose

<sup>1</sup> Os. xi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Corn. à Lapide on Os. xi. 4.

it for Himself. It is true that He possessed full intelligence, reason, and will, and that the perfection of these three created faculties of the soul were so great in Him as to be inconceivable by Angels or by men. And, if it is true that His powers were thus free and perfect, it is likewise true that His infant body was utterly helpless. See what straits His little limbs have to endure ! His hands are powerless, and so are His feet. He who "has poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth" <sup>1</sup> cannot now lift the smallest weight ; and His feet are so weak that He cannot walk until He has attained the age when children make their first steps.

And there is a still more surprising helplessness to be noted in the Holy Child. Not only has He foregone human capacities of action, but even His divinity appears to have been impotent in circumstances where everything seemed to call for its display. When Herod seeks to kill Him, He is forced to fly into Egypt by night. Jesus wrought no miracle before the Shepherds and the Kings, nor for His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, nor to confound His enemies. At least we have good reason for thinking so, if we examine into the

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 12.

predominant characteristics of the holy childhood of Jesus. He always appears to be unable to defend Himself from the malevolence of men, and even against the severity of the weather. This is because He is a Victim, a Victim tied to the altar of sacrifice. That altar is now the Crib ; later on, it will be the Cross : *in funiculis Adam, in vinculis charitatis.*

In our Lord's life there are two main periods in which His helplessness appears in all its humiliation. These two periods are those of His childhood and Passion. But His helplessness stands out still more wonderfully in the first days of His mortal life than in those of His sufferings and death. *Firstly*, because this humiliating state lasted longer in His holy childhood ; *secondly*, because it was the result of the very will of Jesus, whilst at the time of His Passion it was the effect of the perverse wills of men ; and, when God wills immediately Himself, He produces far more extraordinary effects than when He merely suffers human wills to act ; *thirdly*, because although Jesus indeed willed to abandon His glory, He did not will to yield up His wisdom, on the Cross. His wisdom there comes out in the marvellous utterances He then made. In the cave of

Bethlehem, and in the first days of His infancy, on the other hand, He does not speak, no matter who His adoring visitors may be, and no matter what is going on around Him.

O helplessness! O voluntary captivity! O silence of the Word of God! What lessons do they afford me in my impatience for success, in my lack of resignation under sickness or misfortune! What lessons arise from Thy silence, O Word of God! Alas, this teaching is as indispensable as it is high! How full is my life of vain words, and of utterances that offend against humility, charity, simplicity, and prudence!

O Jesus, Thou shovest us a child, and sayest: "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven";<sup>1</sup> but *the* Child whom we must imitate in His humiliation is Thyself, O sweet Child of Bethlehem, O dear Victim of the Crib!

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 3.

## XIV

### THE MYSTERY OF THE CIRCUMCISION

#### I

*This Mystery specially belongs to our Lord  
Jesus Christ's Life as Victim*

THE Evangelist writes : “ And after eight days were accomplished that the child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus, which was called by the Angel, before He was conceived in the womb.”<sup>1</sup>

The circumcision was a ceremony of the Old Law instituted by God Himself. He had laid it upon Abraham and all his descendants. It was performed upon the child’s flesh with a sharp stone, and made the blood flow. It signified that the new-born child belonged to God ; but the shed blood also showed that he had come into the world in a state of sin, and the pain inflicted was regarded as an expiation. Thus, the ceremony of circumcision was both humili-

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 21.

ating and painful. When Sephora, Moses' wife, circumcised her child with a sharp stone and the blood flowed, the Scripture says that she spoke thus to Moses : "A bloody spouse thou art to me."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus came into the world. Clearly, the law of circumcision did not bind him. He had nothing to expiate. Though He was a son of Abraham by His holy Mother, it was the Holy Ghost who had Himself formed Him in her blessed womb with the blood and immaculate flesh of the holy Virgin. He was the Saint of Saints and sanctity itself. Not only there was not, and could not be any taint of original sin in Him, but He willed His Mother too to be entirely free from it.

Why, then, did Jesus undergo the painful humiliation of the law of circumcision ?

Well, here we once more find the word that explains all the states and dispositions of our adorable Redeemer in all these mysteries, and it sheds a wonderful light upon this remarkable episode of His holy childhood. Jesus is the sinner's Victim. It is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation," says St. Paul, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iv. 25.

sinners."<sup>1</sup> He came to save them, and therefore He put Himself in their place. He took what they deserved upon Himself ; the signs of ignominy which were due to them He bore Himself.

The name received by our adorable Victim in this mystery is a confirmation of this truth. He was called Jesus, and this signifies Saviour.

Of this divine name it was written prophetically in the Canticle of Canticles : "Thy name is as oil poured forth."<sup>2</sup> Why "as oil poured forth" ? To remind us that Jesus was ordained to be a High Priest, according to the prophetic word of Leviticus : "The High Priest, that is to say, the greatest among his brethren, upon whose head the oil of unction hath been poured."<sup>3</sup> The High Priest of the Old Law was, indeed, only a figure of our great and adorable High Priest. It is He, and He alone, who has received the holy anointing to be the great and eternal High Priest. The name of Christ, which belongs to Him as well as that of Jesus, only means "anointed," or consecrated with holy oil. Thus when the Holy Ghost speaks as follows in the Canticle of Canticles : "Thy name is as oil poured forth," it is as if He said : "Thy name to-day

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cant. i. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. xxi. 10.

is Jesus, but Thou shalt also be called Christ : Jesus, to express that Thou art the Saviour ; and Christ, to show that Thou art this by Thy priesthood, Thy sacrifice, and Thy state of being a Victim."

May the Holy Ghost indeed enable us to understand the excellence and sublimity of this mystery. May He ever make us love this Saviour and Priest and Sacrifice, this great Victim !

## II

*Our Lord's extreme Humiliation in this  
Mystery*

Humiliation is what underlies all of our Lord's mysteries because He is a Victim, and the primary and fundamental virtue of a victim is humility. All virtues are to be found in Him to an incomparable degree and in a manner altogether worthy of a Man-God ; but just as St. John has described God as *love* (*Deus charitas est*<sup>1</sup>), so may we, on the strength of a passage of St. Paul's, describe God incarnate as *humility* (*Semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens*).<sup>2</sup>

All other virtues are in Him, by habit, by

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 7.

disposition, and by action ; but humility is in a manner His very being as Man-God.

In the mystery of the Circumcision humility and humiliation (the faithful companion of humility) appear in an extraordinary and, perhaps, in a more sensible manner than in any other circumstance of our divine Lord's life. It is generally to be noted that in the other mysteries God the Father willed some special glory to be linked with the humility of Jesus. At the Nativity in the cave, the angelic hymn echoes through the air ; at His Baptism by St. John on the banks of Jordan amongst those who are sinners, the Father's voice is heard glorifying His beloved Son ; in the Garden of Olives, the enemies of Jesus are cast down to the ground by a single word of the Master ; and lastly, upon the Cross, the sun is eclipsed, and at His death the earth quakes, rocks are rent, and the dead rise from their graves.

Here, in the mystery of the eighth day, there is no miracle, no trace of divine power, no utterance of the Father, no angelic hymn. All is pure humiliation, and there is nothing to soften the strange austerity. The stamp of sin is imprinted on the innocent flesh of Jesus, and the entire mystery is contained in this painful rite.

Love, indeed, has ways unknown to our poor reason ! Here, love operates the mystery, and all is contained in the one word, love. We have to learn that nothing is so good for fallen man as to be an abject, an abject with nothing to compensate, purely and simply an abject—because through abjection the sinner enters into the truth, and through it he afterwards rises to glory. To give us this lesson, which is so hard to receive and to understand, our God is not satisfied with being born in poverty, an apparently helpless babe, with appearing in all men's eyes more like "a worm than a man," He also wills to appear as a sinner, and this to Him, the Saint of Saints, is the climax of ignominy ; and in order to appear thus all the more, He wills to bear the brand of it in His flesh, as if He were some branded criminal.

O Jesus ! when shall I have the grace to "comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge" ?<sup>1</sup> O Charity that works such mysteries, bringing down the God of glory to the depths of shame ! O omnipotent Charity, lay hold upon me with all thy

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii. 18, 19.

power, and, in spite of my recalcitrant and abominable pride, plunge me in the depths into which thou hast drawn my only Love, the God of my life and of my eternal being !

## III

*The First Shedding of the Precious Blood in  
this Mystery*

The suffering of Jesus in this mystery was most acute. Here, in addition to all the other discomforts He had to endure, there was the sharp pain of a bleeding wound. He is to redeem the world by the shedding of His blood, and now gives an earnest of this. Ever driven on by love, He one day says to the Apostles : " I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized : and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." He is speaking of the baptism of blood, but the echo of His words is heard through all the mysteries of His holy childhood, and especially in the mystery of the Circumcision. This blood-shedding was by no means necessary, for our redemption might have been wrought without suffering, or else the divine decree that man was to be saved by the shedding of blood might have been fulfilled by the death only apart from the infancy of

our dear Victim. But love is impatient. Already crucified in the ardour of desire, already bathed in His precious blood through His yearning to shed it for us, Jesus from His very birth joyfully abandons Himself to the painful rite that makes it flow from His veins.

Let us venerate this mystery in the spirit of the Saints of all the ages. They adored our divine Lord with the greatest love as they contemplated this first shedding of His blood, a few drops of which would have saved the whole universe and even hell itself, if it were possible to be redeemed. Let us then worship and adore with Mary and St. Joseph, who witnessed the mystery.<sup>1</sup>

Mary, too, was present, but what must she

<sup>1</sup> It is related of the Venerable Sœur Françoise de la Mère de Dieu, a Carmelite nun of Dieppe, that on the feast of the Circumcision the Holy Child once appeared to her "lying in a manger bathed in blood, and the blood dropping from His body into a vessel. Her soul became 'deliciously occupied' with the dignity and price of that adorable Blood, and she cried out in a transport of rapture, 'Ah, my Lord! that was enough to redeem the world, without so much suffering.' He then vouchsafed to reveal to her that He had offered the Blood of the Circumcision to the Father for two objects especially. The first was to satisfy for the sins which had been committed since creation and before the Incarnation; and the second was to obtain for souls the grace of making a right use of His mysteries."—Faber, *The Precious Blood*, ch. iv.

have felt! How could her feelings be expressed? She saw the blood of her dear Son flow, and she knew that the few drops she beheld then were but the heralds of that torrent of blood which was to pour from all the wounds of the scourging and crucifying of Jesus: how grievous a foreboding!

At the same time she knew that this earnest of the shedding of the Precious Blood was offered to the Father for the salvation of souls, and that amongst these souls was her own, and that Jesus had in view her own before all others when He underwent the painful rite. For, like all the descendants of Adam, Mary needed Jesus Christ's redemption, not for the expiation of any sin she had committed, but to preserve her from all sin, original and actual. What a number of lofty feelings must such considerations have aroused in the Blessed Virgin!

On the other hand, while she witnessed all these dispositions of the Heart of Jesus in this mystery, she united with each of them. Like Jesus, she wished to shed her blood for the Father's glory and for the salvation of the world. Like Him she loved humiliation and abjection with an immense love. She sounded the lowest depths of the mystery, and participated in all the conditions of a Victim of ex-

piation which she contemplated in her divine Babe.

And something of the same kind must be said of the great St. Joseph. He, too, participated in her illumination and union to a wonderful degree.

He was not to be present at the painful crucifixion at Calvary. To him the Circumcision in a manner took the place of the Passion. Who can tell what an impression the sight of the Precious Blood made upon his mind, especially if he were himself the minister of the rite, as some have conjectured ?<sup>1</sup> He adored the holy Blood ; he adored the love that made it flow ; and he adored the Sacred Heart, the source of that love. He was filled with immense gratitude, for this blood flowed for him too. Many authors<sup>2</sup> are of opinion that he, too, was freed from the taint of original sin from his mother's womb, and that would have been in virtue of this Blood ; and all the graces he had received through life, graces of preservation from sin and of sanctification, he also owed solely to this adorable blood-shedding. At the

<sup>1</sup> Suarez in III p. S. Thom., d. xv, § 1.

<sup>2</sup> S. Theoph. Episc. Antioch., Ap. Isidore Isolan. — Gerson, Suarez, etc.—Corn. à Lapide, *in Matt. i. 16.*

same time he knew what were the dispositions of the Holy Child, he knew His humility, penance, mortification, and zeal for His Father's glory and for the redemption of souls. And into these dispositions he entered himself.

O Mary ! O Joseph ! How little can we understand the sanctification of your wonderfully prepared souls in the presence of this mystery, and of all the mysteries of the Holy Child ! You went from rapture to rapture, and grace filled your hearts like a great river flowing through a well-watered valley.<sup>1</sup> Happy are they who are empty of all temporal things, of all vanity, disordered affection and delusions, and who come to Jesus as you did to receive, like you, grace from these holy mysteries ! They, too, are filled in their turn with the fulness of which St. Paul speaks as follows : *ut impleamini in omnem plenitudinem Dei.*<sup>2</sup> Filled with graces of all kinds, they abound in all the fulness of God.

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. xxxix. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. iii. 19.

## XV

### THE MYSTERY OF THE EPIPHANY—THE MAGI AS OUR EXAMPLES

#### I

##### *The Magi seek Jesus*

ALL do not seek Jesus with fitting dispositions. Our divine Lord said to the Jews in tones well adapted to inspire dread : “ You shall seek Me, and shall not find Me ; and where I am, thither you cannot come. . . . You shall die in your sin.”<sup>1</sup> This was because among His enemies and His detractors some sought Him to oppose His teaching and to put Him to death. Others sought Him, but sought Him with pride, desiring to find a powerful worldly Messias who possessed riches and glory ; and they had not the happiness of finding the true Messias who was lowly and poor.

There are still the ungodly who pursue our Lord with hatred and blasphemy, and who, like the Jews of old, wish to put Him to death ;

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 34 and viii. 21.

but they will not find Him, and they run the risk of dying in their sin. There are also heretics who pretend to seek Jesus in His Gospel and in Holy Writ ; but they seek Him with pride, and they find Him not, because Jesus must be sought in His Church and in her teachings, which must be received with humility. There are even Catholics who appear to seek Jesus Christ because they love the word of God, but their dispositions are not pure, for curiosity plays too large a part in their search. This manner of seeking Jesus makes them unworthy of finding Him.

He must be sought as the Magi of the East sought Him. They sought Him with simplicity, —with disinterestedness and self-sacrifice,— and with constancy.

1. *Simplicity.*—They had seen the star, and they had arrived. Their faith is truly great and heroic ; but how simple is it too ! They reached Jerusalem, and there they come to Herod's palace, and say : “ Where is He that is born King of the Jews ? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him.”<sup>1</sup> They had indeed had a great grace ; but they had to bow the pride of their natural

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 2.

reason before it. This they did, and they come and tell the object of their journey quite naturally: "We have come to adore Him." The Evangelist adds: "Herod was troubled, and Jerusalem with him."<sup>1</sup> The Magi were not disturbed at all this astonishment and alarm. Their faith remained simple. They understood what God meant by sending the star; and they paid no attention to anything but the answer they received from the priests and the doctors of the Synagogue; for these represented the teaching authority set up by God. Moreover, these merely quoted the prophecy of Micheas: "And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule over My people Israel."<sup>2</sup>

The Magi leave Jerusalem; the star which had momentarily disappeared again shines forth; and they rejoice with exceeding great joy. Thus does the simplicity of their faith and hope break forth. And now they are at Jesus' feet, at the feet of a Child in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger amidst the straw, in a stable made in a cave. And they adore Him without the least hesitation of mind, repugnance of reason, or

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Mich. v. 2.

resistance of will. Of a truth they sought Jesus with simplicity.

2. *Disinterestedness and Self-sacrifice*.—They left all to come. Jesus is a treasure which induces men to cast away all other possessions. Jesus is indeed the sole object of their seeking. Listen to what they say : “ We have come to adore Him.” They ask not for miracles, or this world’s goods, or political advantages, or worldly wisdom, or the like. They come to Jesus for Jesus. *Vidimus stellam Ejus in Oriente, et venimus adorare Eum.*

And we may go farther still, for they come not to receive so much as to give. They bring with them the most precious things they can find : gold, incense, and myrrh. They desire to show that they strip themselves of everything, and that they make an offering of everything to the new-born Babe. These gifts express the feelings of their hearts. There is nothing but self-sacrifice in this mystery ; in their own way they offer sacrifice to Jesus, both by inward adoration and by outward oblation of the gifts. How can one help finding Jesus, when one seeks Him with such dispositions as these ?

3. *Constancy*.—This is an essential disposition. Jesus is a hidden God.<sup>1</sup> He loves silence

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlv. 15.

and darkness. His mysteries are abysses, His ways are unexplored paths. Great perseverance in vocal and mental prayer, in faithfulness to inner promptings and all kinds of calls, are needed if we are to reach the solitude and the depths where He pleases to dwell. See what impediments stood in the way of the journeying of the Wise Men of the East! They had to leave their own country far behind them, and then there was the great distance they had to travel (they are generally supposed to have come from Arabia Felix, about a thousand miles from Bethlehem), the weariness of the way, and then, at Jerusalem, the anti-alien feeling shown them by Herod, the priests, and the Jews, and there were many other difficulties which are unknown to us. They overcome all these. They did as the Holy Ghost bids us : "If you seek, seek. Seek ye the Lord evermore, and be strengthened."<sup>1</sup> This they did, and according to the promise attached to the command, "their heart rejoiced";<sup>2</sup> for they found Him who is the highest good, *omne bonum*.<sup>3</sup>

Let us now examine ourselves. How do we seek Jesus? What is our estimate of Him?

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxi. 12; Ps. civ. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. civ. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Exod. xxxiii. 19.

If we only knew Him, our life would be a perpetual search for this priceless Treasure.

## II

*The Magi find Jesus*

The Evangelist says: "And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down they adored Him."

What beautiful and sweet words! They have sought, and now they have found; and He whom they have found is the Treasure of heaven and earth. He Himself will one day utter this beautiful parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field. Which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." This treasure is Jesus;<sup>1</sup> the mysterious field is His holy Mother, who is called by the Holy Ghost "a closed garden."<sup>2</sup> St. Joseph finds this wonderful treasure buried and hidden in this virgin field;<sup>3</sup> the Magi find it unconcealed in the Blessed Virgin's arms. But St. Joseph and the Magi were like the man

<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome, and Cornelius à Lapide, *on Matt.* xiii. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Cant. iv. 12.      <sup>3</sup> St. Jerome, *Brev. Rom.*, March 19.

in the parable : they disdained more than ever all that is of earth on seeing the heavenly Treasure. What a fortunate discovery ! and, for the Wise Men of the East, how happy an issue to all their efforts ! The Shepherds find Jesus, and the Kings too find Him, because they both sought Him with simplicity, with disinterestedness, and with constancy. We too shall find Him if we seek Him with the same feelings.

But let us specially dwell upon this passage of the holy Scribe : "They found the Child with Mary His Mother." Others will seek Him and will find Him ; but He will be alone, as we read of Him in certain passages of the Gospel. The Magi find Him with Mary His Mother. How sweet are these words ! What joy do they inspire ! and, at the same time, how full they are of teaching !

It is here that we see Mary's glory. The Magi call the Child Jesus King : "Where is He that is born King of the Jews ?" If they name Jesus a King, they acknowledge that His Mother Mary is truly a Queen. Thus she appears in their eyes as the Mistress and Sovereign of the new kingdom of grace which Jesus comes into the world to set up. And as a

proof of their recognition of this sovereignty of the Son and of His Mother, a sovereignty which is all heavenly and divine, they bring as offerings the most precious of all metals, gold, which, according to the interpretation of the Church,<sup>1</sup> designates the royal authority of Him to whom it is offered ; and their offering is made with adoration.

Thus they are happy enough to come to know Jesus as He is in the mystery of His Incarnation, apparently small and weak, and still in reality greatness and omnipotence itself ; poor and destitute of all things, and yet possessing all the wealth of nature, grace, and glory ; an Infant condemned by His own choice to all the disadvantages of infancy, and nevertheless God eternal, immense, infinite, and supremely blessed.

They find Mary too, and they acknowledge her to be what she is in the eyes of the Angels. They see and venerate in this lowly Virgin, who had to take refuge in a poor stable, the Queen of the world, the all-powerful Sovereign of heaven and earth, of Angels and men, and, to sum up all in one word, the Mother of God.

How happy is he who really finds Jesus and Mary in truth, that is to say, fully entering into their mysteries ! Immensely greater is

<sup>1</sup> See The Office for the Epiphany.

the felicity of the finder of Jesus and Mary who gives himself to Jesus by Mary for ever, not desiring to live apart from their ineffable companionship, and wishing to live in the spirit of their holy mysteries, a victim with them, and like them, unto the glory of the Father who is in heaven.

## III

*The Magi worship Jesus as both Priest and Victim*

The Church herself suggests this view to us in the feast of the Epiphany. Here are her words:<sup>1</sup> “To-day the Magi worship the Author of our salvation lying in His cradle. They offered Him three precious gifts, and these gifts contain divine mysteries. The gold was offered to show the royal power of the new-born Babe; in the incense is to be seen His high priesthood; and in the myrrh the mystery of His burial.”

Let us see how the incense pays tribute to His priesthood, and the myrrh to His burial.

In the Old Law incense belonged only to the priesthood. This precious substance is often

<sup>1</sup> *Resp. and Vers. Lection of Nocturn i, octav. Epiph.—Hymn. Laud.*

mentioned in Holy Scripture, but it is always to be found in connection with priests and Levites. To dare to offer it, to carry a censer was a sacrilege on the part of a layman, and it was sometimes punished with terrible penalties. One day king Ozias, who until then had been one of the most holy and famous kings of Juda, went to the temple, and presuming upon his royal rank, desired to offer incense to the Lord on the altar of incense. The high priest Azarias, and with him twenty-four priests, forcibly intervened, telling the king that the right belonged solely to the sons of Aaron and his descendants. But the king persisted in his determination to offer the incense. Immediately his forehead was covered with dreadful leprosy, and he suffered from it all the rest of his life. On his death, he lost the honour of a royal burial.<sup>1</sup>

The Magi guided by the Holy Ghost brought Arabian incense, and offered it to Jesus because He was a High Priest. Thus they acknowledge that He possessed this eminent office, and they desire to pay tribute to it by this mysterious gift.

But this incense was only a figure. It was not this that was to be offered by Him to His

<sup>1</sup> 2 Paral. xxvi. 16-23.

Father. His censer is His adorable divinity ; the incense He puts into the censer is His holy humanity ; and the fire in which the incense is consumed is the fire of divine charity. This fire is ever burning before the living God, both in heaven and in the tabernacle.

How could the Magi know of this mystery ? We cannot tell ; but certainly they knew it well enough to be wonderfully rapt at the sight of the spectacle which their great faith enabled them to behold.

And when they offered incense to their High Priest, they also meant to offer themselves. For the real incense to be offered to this heavenly High Priest is every creature, which also ought to be consumed in the fire of charity. Mary, Joseph, the Angels, and all the Saints are consumed in it. The Magi offered themselves and flung themselves lovingly into this immense furnace. Perhaps this is one of the hidden meanings contained in the following passage of the Gospel : *Et procidentes adoraverunt Eum*, “ and falling down they adored Him.”

Let us yield ourselves up like the Magi, let us fling ourselves into the holy fire, let us be the incense which is consumed, and let us

honour and glorify God the Father in Jesus Christ by the burning up of all that is of this world in ourselves.

Again Holy Church says to us : " And in the myrrh consider the Lord's burial."<sup>1</sup> Now, the burial of our Lord is a mystery directly connected with His office of being a Victim. It corresponds with the condition of the victims under the law in the Old Testament after they were slain and put upon the altar to be burnt. In our Lord Jesus Christ this burning up took place, according to Pope Benedict XIV,<sup>2</sup> in the mystery of the Resurrection ; but that of His burial, in which our divine Victim appears lifeless in the tomb, realizes what is prefigured by the state of the victims under the law of which we have just spoken.

Thus the Magi enlightened by the Holy Ghost see in the Babe of Bethlehem the world's chief and only Victim ; they see Him already immolated, and already contemplate Him in the mystery of His death, and they intend to pay tribute

<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose says: *Quæ sunt ista veræ fidei munera ? Aurum Regi, thus Deo, myrrha Defuncto. . . . Aliud (myrrha) honor est sepulturæ, quæ non corrumpat corpus mortui, sed reservet.*—Brev. Rom., 6th day of Octave of Epiph.—*Patrol. Lat.* XV, 1569.

<sup>2</sup> *De sacrificio Missæ*, II, xi, § 5.

to the mystery of His burial by offering the myrrh. The Magdalene is praised by our Lord for pouring the ointment upon His head and feet, because she thereby proclaims and foretells His burial. How must the Wise Men of the East have brought comfort to His Sacred Heart when, in the earliest days of His infancy, they proclaim and venerate a mystery which consummates His sacrifice.

We have just noted the beautiful words, "And falling down they adored Him." They contain a great mystery of grace. As they fell to the ground, Jesus consecrated them to be His victims. In them all the human was as it were "buried," to use St. Paul's words,<sup>1</sup> and they arose new men living in the spirit of Jesus the Sacrificial Victim, ready to make any sacrifice to spread the knowledge of Him and to give their blood for His name. Tradition tells, indeed, how they had the happiness of shedding it as a testimony to His divinity.

Let us be victims along with Jesus and for Jesus. Let us be satisfied with honouring His priesthood and Sacrifice with generosity and faithfulness. Let us fall down and give ourselves up to the grace that flows from the

<sup>1</sup> Col. ii. 12.

Crib and from all the mysteries of Jesus Christ, and let us become sacrifices, offered, immolated, buried, and ready to receive the new resurrection life. All these lessons are contained in the mystery of the Epiphany ; and although it has its own special grace, yet all other graces, too, may be given us if we venerate it, because it is Jesus Himself whom we adore in it, for Jesus Christ is always the source of every grace in every circumstance of His life.

## XVI

THE RELIGIOUS ON THE DAY OF THEIR HOLY PROFESSION, LIKE THE MAGI, OFFER THEIR DIVINE BRIDEGROOM GOLD, AND FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

### I

#### *Gold—the Vow and Virtue of holy Poverty*

GOLD is the most precious of the metals, and therefore it is the symbol of wealth. Everyone understands it to be this. Hence, to offer Jesus gold is to show that one strips oneself for the love of Him of all one's possession ; it is to sacrifice them all for Him, either in honour of His poverty, or else for the sake of the heavenly blessings He promises us in exchange.

We do not know how far such divine knowledge had reached the Magi of the East when they left their country and came to Bethlehem ; but undoubtedly, when they fell down so humbly at the feet of the Holy Child in the manger and adored God concealed beneath all

this lowliness with such great faith, they must have received wonderful and inestimable illumination as to the mystery of His humiliation and as to His divine mission in the world. They must have offered their splendid gifts with the loftiest feelings of religion ; they must have understood the vanity of all earthly things in the presence of Him who was the universal and infinite Good ; and, if they could not strip themselves outwardly of all their riches, certainly they freed themselves inwardly of all attachment to the things of this world. How could the sight of the crib and the straw and the poor swaddling clothes help working in them such an invaluable grace ? We in our weak faith meditating on this mystery of denudation and destitution are melted to tears, and necessity is laid upon us to seek poverty when in the presence of such great need. What, then, must have been the feelings of the Wise Men who made such sacrifices to come and adore Jesus, and whose indomitable faith had not flinched before the unbelief of Herod and the indifference of the priests of the Synagogue ? They offered their gold to Jesus, and with this symbol they made a sacrifice of everything else. Desiring to become the disciples of Him who said by means of His state of poverty

before He uttered the saying with His lips : “ Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he posseseth, cannot be My disciple,” <sup>1</sup> they renounced all and became in spirit the truly poor of Jesus Christ.

And their example has been followed. All those who are consecrated to God by making the vow of poverty walk in the footsteps of the Magi. They have given the Lord their gold, that is to say, all that belongs to them, and they have not only stripped themselves of all outward possessions, but also of all inner attachment to the perishable goods of this world. For it is quite true that it is no use to be poor in appearance only, if an unruly love for things temporal still leaves us rich in desire and in our affection for all such vanities. The vow deprives us of the right of making any outward act of proprietorship, however little ; and the virtue of the same name forbids us to entertain the least interior disorderly attachment for the smallest thing. There are things which are indispensable and such as are used daily ; well and good, this gives the religious an opportunity for making meritorious sacrifices. He will make use of such opportunities with gratitude to

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiv. 33.

God from whom come all blessings, small and great, which our daily life requires, but he will not let his heart become attached to any of these in an unruly manner.

And this state is so beautiful in God's sight! The infinite excellences of God as the centre of all good and of all bliss appear so evidently to those who are consecrated to Him by religious vows ; also the Crib of the Holy Child Jesus appears to them in such an attractive and amiable light that all that belongs to this world seems to them but vanity and vexation of spirit. Moreover, not only do they not become attached to anything earthly, but they also desire to be stripped of what appears indispensable to such as have not tasted of the gift of God nor understood the value of supernatural riches. They are afraid of any superfluity and satisfied with what is strictly necessary, and even what is necessary must bear the mark of the poverty of Jesus. What is common, what is shabby, what seems merely good for nothing, this is what they prefer, because it expresses more clearly the spirit of the Crib of Bethlehem. And even if what is necessary is wanting through the ordering of divine Providence, they rejoice therein instead of complaining about it, remembering how much was wanting in the

poor stable to the Holy Child in His swaddling clothes.

Oh! how does such a soul give all its gold to Jesus! How entire is its offering, and how complete its denudation! Let those who are in the world aspire to the same holy temper. After all, what Jesus expects and begs of us in this mystery of denudation and destitution is the putting off of interior attachments. The Kings offered their gold, but the stripping off of everything is what took place within them, and this it was that gave the highest worship to Jesus and comforted His Heart most. St. Louis, the King of France, was able to be as inwardly poor as St. Francis of Assisi his contemporary, the passionate lover of poverty ; and our Lord Himself says expressly : “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

But it must be acknowledged that the practice of external poverty, which is binding upon the religious through the vow of poverty, is a very great help towards reaching perfection in the practice of interior poverty.

O Jesus ! give all those who love Thee and Thy Crib, Thy lowliness and Thy denudation, whether they be under vows or living in the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 3.

world ; give them the signal grace of holding an outward condition of poverty in high esteem and of living inwardly in perfect detachment from all that is perishable. May they give all "their gold" freely and without looking back ; and may their only ambition be the one good, Thyself, O Jesus, the only good worth wishing for in this world or in the world to come !

## II

*Frankincense—the Vow and the Virtue  
of Chastity*

St. Paul thus describes the dispositions of all Christians, especially of Christian Virgins who keep their virginity pure : "He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. . . . And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord : that she may be holy both in body and spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Thus her state is rather heavenly than earthly. Her life is indeed inspired with an angelic spirit. Our Lord Himself compares Virgins with Angels, of whom He says that they "always see the face of My Father who

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 32, 34.

is in heaven.”<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom goes so far as to put Virgins before Angels,<sup>2</sup> because, says he, the latter naturally care for God, being pure spirits untroubled by any counter-impulses in their aspirations towards the sovereign Good, whilst Virgins, being clothed with bodies of corruption, cannot soar upwards to their one and only Love except by reacting strongly and constantly against the depraved instincts of human nature.

Thus virginity is the state of a soul which, in spite of the heaviness of the body and the downward tendencies of earth which are congenial to it, rises towards God and abides in loving expectancy, waiting upon Him to yield Him every kind of homage. But what does Holy Scripture tell us about frankincense? It teaches us that this precious material is the symbol of our worship of God, and especially of prayer.<sup>3</sup> “Let my prayer be directed as incense in Thy sight,”<sup>4</sup> says David. In the Apocalypse, St. John relates how he saw an Angel carrying a golden censer, “and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer of the prayers of all saints upon the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Hom. on Feast S. Aloysius*, June 21.

<sup>3</sup> Wisdom xviii. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. clx. 2.

golden altar, which is before the throne of God. And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God, from the hand of the Angel."<sup>1</sup>

The justice of the comparison is plain. Incense is cast into the fire, and it rises in sweet fumes towards heaven ; thus prayer rises from a heart inflamed with divine charity, and ascends to God with a savour of sweetness. Incense burns, and rises immediately ; thus, too, prayer consumes the soul entirely when it becomes lost in the contemplation of God, and it then rises towards Him in all confidence, because it knows that God, who sees into its inmost depths, sees that it belongs to Him and cares for nothing but Him. *Sollicitus est quæ Domini sunt, quomodo placeat Deo.* Thus does St. Paul describe the virgin soul. It cares for nothing but God, and entirely belongs to God ; its mind is not divided, and it thinks only of Him ; its heart is not partitioned, and it loves Him alone ; and all this is to the honour of God and brings comfort to His Bridegroom's Heart ; but it is also a cause of joy and edification to the Church. For, like the incense which burns and ascends towards God's altar, and thus fills

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. viii. 3, 4.

the holy temple with its sweet fumes, so the Virgin by her heavenly example perfumes the Church militant with the sweet odour of her purity. She is wholly drawn and impelled to aspire towards God ; but those who constitute the mystical Body, and who are the witnesses of her sacrifice, thank God for the spectacle afforded them, and are incited to the greatest fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom.

When incense is cast into the fire, it is a real holocaust, for it is altogether burnt up. This is why in the Old Testament there was an altar of incense, and the honour of serving at this altar was very high, as we saw in our last meditation. We are told of St. Zachary that when he was visited by the Archangel Gabriel, who came to announce the birth of St. John the Baptist, he was offering incense, and that the Angel stood on the right hand of the altar of incense.<sup>1</sup>

The sacrifice of incense burnt in the presence of God was, then, a great sacrifice and a true holocaust. But the Fathers of the Church often call virginity a holocaust. St. Jerome says expressly : “ Virginity is a Christian hol-

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 9 ff.

caust, and, wonderful to tell, virginity makes its own sacrifice!"<sup>1</sup>

It offers its true sacrifice and becomes a holocaust by making the vow of chastity, thus consecrating itself entirely to God as a bride of Jesus Christ.

Happy state! The Magi offered material incense; far happier are they who offer the incense of their virginity to the immortal Bridegroom. "Those who marry," says St. Paul, "shall have tribulations of the flesh."<sup>2</sup> Those who give themselves to God, who give themselves to Jesus Christ, contracting with Him a union of which the marriage contract is but a rough image, these enter into heavenly joys even in this world. "Blessed are the clean of heart," says our divine Lord, "for they shall see God."<sup>3</sup>

But, of a truth, the virginity demanded by Jesus is less that of the body than that of the soul; and however precious the former may be, the latter is specially what He looks upon with favour. Among the Virgins in the Gospel five were rejected despite their outward virginity. Let us all be virgins in heart and will; whatever our vocation may be, let this be our incense. It is, indeed,

<sup>1</sup> *Patrol. Lat.*, XXVI, 1113, *in Ps. xcv.*

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 8.

true that it will have a less sweet perfume in a mystical sense, if we cannot offer the heavenly Bridegroom our bodily virginity ; yes, it will not be so sweet ; the oblation of consecrated Virgins is always a source of joy to the spotless Lamb, and nothing can equal it ; but if our thoughts are pure, our affections chaste, our senses free from all guilty stain, we shall have a place kept for us at the eternal marriage-feast of the Lamb of God.

O Jesus, dear Holy Child of Bethlehem ! O Bridegroom of the pure in heart ! receive my frankincense, receive my soul and my body, accept my mind and my senses. Let all that is within me be as an odour of sweet-smelling savour unto Thee ! I ask of Thee this heavenly favour by the merits of the virginity of Thy Mother, the sweet and beloved Queen and Patron of Virgins, and by the merits of her holy Spouse St. Joseph, the Father and Guardian of the clean of heart.

### III

#### *Myrrh—the Vow and the Virtue of Obedience*

Myrrh was used by the ancients, especially by the Jews, to embalm the dead, in order to

preserve them from the corruption of the grave. Holy Church, in the Office of the Epiphany, teaches us that the Magi brought and offered myrrh to the Holy Child of Bethlehem to honour the mystery of His burial beforehand ; and it is written that Nicodemus brought to Calvary on the eve of Good Friday a compound of myrrh and aloes for embalming the body of Jesus after He had been taken down from the Cross.

Now, what has myrrh to do with Christian obedience ? Let us see. But, first of all, what is Christian obedience ? One of the old Fathers tells us : "It is a real death, it is the burial of the will."<sup>1</sup> Everyone who is obedient according to the spirit of Jesus Christ is a dead man : this great truth is confirmed by what St. Paul tells us about Baptism, a sacrament the special grace of which is just that of obedience to the will of God.<sup>2</sup> What does the great Apostle say ? "Know ye not that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death ? For we are buried together with Him by baptism unto death."<sup>3</sup> Thus we see that the terms baptismal grace, obedience, death,

<sup>1</sup> S. Joan. Clim. ap. Cornelius à Lapide, *in Heb.* v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> See the Priest's first words to the child about to be baptized.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. vi. 3, 4.

and mystical burial, are synonymous. He who uses the word "Christian" designates a man who is dead to himself, to his self-interest, to his self-will—that is to say, a man who is altogether obedient. Such must every Christian be if he is guided by baptismal grace.

Now, what does the religious do? He desires to strengthen in himself this precious grace of obedience. He means to preserve in himself, and that unimpaired, the state of death. For it is a well-known monastic maxim that a religious must be, as it were, a dead man, *perinde ac cadaver*; and St. Ignatius put the saying into his Constitutions. What, then, does the religious do, when he has come to understand this great truth better than any who live in the world? He brings myrrh on the day of his profession. This mystical myrrh is his vow. By his vow he preserves within himself the spirit of the dead man, which is the grace and virtue of obedience; and just as myrrh is a substance that preserves the dead, so does the vow which he offers to God preserve from deterioration his vow of obedience and the spirit which he received in holy Baptism. He is really dead by the grace of the sacrament; but he wants his death made permanent by his vow; and the spiritual

myrrh, his religious vow, establishes him for ever in this state. And thus henceforward, like a well-embalmed corpse, he looks as if he were alive, while really he is not so. He will not only be indifferent, but really and absolutely dead to all praise and honour and all things. Whether he be stripped to the barest poverty, or clothed in the richest of raiment, it will make no difference to him. Whatever the position assigned him, he will desire no other, for he is dead. His opinions are dead, his desires are dead, and his will is dead.

All the Saints have extolled the perfection of such a state, the nobility of such a grace. It is the splendid comfort of those who have to command, the felicity of those who have to obey, the source of life to all who behold it. The Magi received this heavenly blessing. This is shown by their conduct after they had presented their offering. Their greatest delight would have been to tarry long near the Holy Child. Like St. Peter on Thabor, they would have desired to erect three tabernacles, but in all things they were subject to the leadings of divine grace. They had come in obedience to faith, and they were equally faithful in returning to their own land. Thus

did they immolate their wills, and their inward longing not to lose the beloved sight of Jesus and His Blessed Mother. Moreover in obedience to faith they returned by another road. And from this time onward apparently they are determined not to take a single step unless it is decreed by the Holy Child who is now their sovereign Lord. Whether they knew it or not, the myrrh they had just offered was the symbol of the new spirit that animated them.

O holy obedience, be thou henceforth the mainspring of my acts. Thou art death, and thy works are works of life. O Jesus, Thou hast received from my unworthy hands Gold and Frankincense ; accept Myrrh too, that is to say, my firm determination to fulfil all Thy commandments, to be faithful to all that is pleasing unto Thee, and to follow all Thy promptings ; and, seeing Thee and Thine authority in those who are in Thy stead, whether in the Church or in the family, may I, O Jesus, who wast obedient unto the death of the Cross, may I be like Thee and Thy Mother Mary, and like all the Saints, an obedient soul. May my obedience be humble, sincere, always supernatural and disinterested, and may it also be always entire ! May I ever better understand

that obedience is an infallible guide to lead me from this life to a happy eternity, that it is this that opens to us the gates of heaven, and assigns us thrones in Thine eternal kingdom among the Princes of Thy predestined people.

## XVII

### THE MYSTERY OF THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSSED VIRGIN

#### I

*Mary goes to the Temple to fulfil the Law of  
Purification*

THE law of purification was given by God Himself to His people. It bound every woman after the birth of a child to be regarded as unclean, not that the birth of a child could have any such effect, but because of man's state of disfavour in God's sight through original sin. In this sense, every child born into the world is really unclean. But, under the law of fear, the mother of the new-born babe might be looked upon as sharing this uncleanness. And therefore she was forbidden to enter into the Sanctuary for forty days after the birth of a child, and during that time she was not allowed to touch anything holy. But after the fortieth day, she had to come to the door of the Tabernacle of Witness. There, she offered the

priest a yearling lamb, which had to be burnt by fire, and a young dove or pigeon, which was to be immolated for the expiation of her sin ; or else, if the mother was poor, she offered for the same purpose two young doves or two pigeons. The priest received the offerings, and prayed for her, and then she was clean.

Clearly, that law did not apply to Mary, and also the law contained a prohibition which she could not obey.

First, the law did not apply to Mary, since the Holy Child she brought to the Temple was so far from involving her in any sort of defilement that it had only hallowed her virginity. The presence of Jesus in her womb was the source of a sanctification the incomparable beauty of which is known only to God, and at the moment of the holy birth this wonderful sanctification was enhanced beyond all that even Angels could conceive. And not only had the Blessed Virgin's mind and heart gained from the birth of the incarnate Word an unutterable increase of grace, but even her immaculate flesh had received a kind of divine consecration. A virgin before the childbearing, she was to be ever a virgin, since the Holy Child had only dwelt in her womb in the manner

of a glorious body. As the risen Jesus was one day to traverse the stone of the sepulchre without breaking the seals upon it, so did He leave the virgin womb of His Mother without any diminution of her heavenly integrity.

Thus Mary had no need of cleansing. The fruit of her chaste womb was the Saint of Saints, the Holy One, as He was called by the Angel who announced the mystery of the Incarnation, and Mary had conceived Him miraculously by the operation of the Holy Ghost in the purest love of God, a love such as that of all the elect put together could never equal.

But, secondly, and this, too, proves that the law of purification did not apply to Mary, there was in that law a prohibition which she could not observe. During the forty days following the birth of her child the mother was forbidden to touch anything holy. But, how could Mary fulfil this precept, since her maternal duties bound her to give all possible attention to her Babe? As a vigilant and tender Mother, was she not obliged to wrap it in swaddling clothes, to warm its hands and feet in her hands, to carry it in her arms, to nurse it and feed it at her breast? How could she help touching it in

performing these sacred duties? How was she to avoid touching anything holy<sup>1</sup> since her Babe was Holiness itself, and the source and origin of all holiness?

Surely, this prohibition of the law of purification did not apply to the Mother of Jesus.

And, must we not also remark that there was another point in the same law which it was really impossible for Mary to observe? The gate of the Temple was forbidden to her during forty days. But, where was the Temple, the true Temple, from the day of the Incarnation, the twenty-fifth of March, to be found except at Nazareth, all the six months preceding the birth of Jesus; at Hebron, during the three months that followed the Archangel's visit; and at Bethlehem, during the forty days that had just gone by? The Temple was any place where Jesus dwelt; the Temple was Mary herself. O Temple, far more wonderful than that of Solomon and Zerobabel at Jerusalem! O Temple, where the true and living God received worship far worthier of His Majesty, and far more welcome to His Heart!

But, to return to the chief mystery, which is Mary's obedience to the law of purification.

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xii. 4.

She was not bound to obey it, and yet she did obey it. She obeyed it, because she possessed in a pre-eminent degree the mind of Jesus, of which St. Paul says: "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."<sup>1</sup> And did not the gentle Jesus Himself submit to the humiliating law of circumcision? Mary had beheld this mystery with its extraordinary marks of humiliation and obedience, and she joyfully fathomed the same depths of abjection and submission; she humbly put herself among other women, bringing to the Temple the two pigeons or the two young doves, one for a burnt offering, the other for a sin offering, and offered them to the priest for him to pray for her according to the law, and that she might be clean.

O deep mystery! O wonderful obedience of the Son and His Mother! O astounding humiliation of both! When shall we beat down our pride and insubordination on beholding all this humility! Jesus is God, and He is counted as a babe which has made its mother unclean! Mary is a Virgin a thousand times purer than heaven itself, and she appears as an ordinary woman subject to the defilements of

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 8.

ordinary mothers ! And Jesus and Mary find satisfaction in their humiliation ! O Jesus ! O Mary ! Have mercy upon me, and deliver me from the abominable depths in which my pride keeps me fettered.

## II

*Mary goes to the Temple to offer Jesus to His heavenly Father*

Here again Mary fulfilled a law God Himself had given to Moses. The Lord said : "Sanctify unto Me every first-born that openeth the womb among the children of Israel, as well of men as of beasts : for they are all Mine."<sup>1</sup> The absolute dedication of the first-born here mentioned, strictly speaking, would have involved the child's immolation as a holocaust to the Majesty of God ; but the Lord had expressly said that He would not have this,<sup>2</sup> and that He would only have the infant offered to Him and afterwards redeemed by the payment to the priest of the sum of five shekels, its mother offering for her purification a lamb and a young dove, or two young doves, or else two pigeons.

Now, St. Luke teaches us in his Gospel in accordance with this law, that Mary and Joseph

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xiii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xiii. 13.

came to the Temple to offer the Holy Child to the Lord;<sup>1</sup> and this touching ceremony suggests a very different reflection from that which we made in speaking of the law of purification. It is clear that Mary, on account of her wonderful holiness and purity, was not in any way subject to the latter; but it is perfectly true that Jesus was more subject than any other child could possibly be to the law of sanctification to God. Indeed, we may say that this law had been made mainly with Him in view. Was He not the First-born before all others? for, is not this just the name applied to Him by St. Paul? *Primogenitus omnis creaturae?*<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if the law of sanctification was founded upon the relation existing between every creature and Himself, as God Himself declares, is it not true that Jesus is God's more than is any other being? Oh, how pre-eminently does He belong to God! how truly is He God's sphere and possession and property!

Thus, Jesus had to be offered and immolated; and He was to be His Father's Victim and Holocaust. The Holy Child knew this well: at the beginning of His Incarnation He had said: "Holocausts for sin did not please Thee.

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Col. i. 15; Rom. viii. 29.

Then said I: Behold, I come,"<sup>1</sup> to take the place of all other victims ; and His oblation was accepted by the Father. It was accepted at the time of His Incarnation ; it was afterwards publicly accepted in the mystery of the Purification, but in this Jesus was not immolated. His painful immolation was deferred for three and thirty years ; and meanwhile, like an ordinary child He was legally redeemed with five shekels of silver.

Jesus offered Himself ; and this He did by the outward ministry of Mary and St. Joseph, and especially by Mary. But Mary herself also really offered Him, and for this reason. Here there was a sacrifice, and Jesus was the Victim. Now, in the Old Law, God strictly forbade the offering of any stolen victim. The victim had to belong to the person who offered it. But, what child ever belonged to its mother as Jesus belonged to Mary ? Clearly, our holy Patron St. Joseph possessed Him in a manner which was imperfect compared with the right of possession which was Mary's. Hence Mary had to offer Him.

And then, if Jesus was a Victim, and in this mystery mainly a Victim, and not so plainly a

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 6, 7.

Priest, to whom could He better communicate His spirit of priesthood for offering His outward Oblation than to His Mother ? And lastly, if Jesus is the Victim, He must have an altar. But what worthier altar could He find than the hands of the immaculate Virgin ?

For all these reasons Mary really had the right to offer Jesus to His heavenly Father in this mystery.

Who, then, can describe the inward dispositions with which Mary offered this one Victim of heaven and earth, the Sacrifice whose every act and state corresponded with all that is due to the infinite majesty of God ? Two great servants of Mary, St. Thomas of Villanova and St. Bernardine of Siena, thought they heard in mental prayer the words addressed by the holy Virgin to the Father when she was making her offering ; they are as follows, and they lift a small corner of the veil which conceals the wonders of divine love in Mary.

“ When the Holy Virgin came to the altar, she knelt down, and, holding her Son in her hands, she offered Him to God the Father as an oblation well pleasing to His majesty ; and, with a heart inflamed with the Holy Ghost, she said : ‘ O Almighty Father, take this oblation

which I make to Thee for the whole world. I who am Thy handmaid offer it. Take this Son who belongs both to Thee and to me ; He is Thine from all eternity, He is only just now mine. I give Thee unbounded thanks for descending thus to honour me, willing me to be the Mother of Him of whom Thou art the Father. Take now from the hands of Thy servant this most holy morning Sacrifice, which shall one day be offered Thee as an evening Sacrifice on the wood of the Cross. Consider, O Most Holy Father, both the Victim I am offering to Thee, and for whom I am offering It. . . .<sup>1</sup> For I know the value of the Oblation I am making unto Thee, and I know for whom I am offering It. I offer It Thee for my well-beloved children that their sins may be expiated, and that they may be illumined and moulded by grace, that they may receive Thy help in this world, and Thy glory hereafter. And thus do I give to my children of grace my own Son, and I give myself also, desiring to be wholly theirs in all their needs.'"

Thus spake our holy Mother, and the flames of her love of God and of souls mingled with

<sup>1</sup> Thus far, from St. Thomas of Villanova (*Opera*, p. 611); afterwards, from St. Bernardine of Siena (*Opera* IV, p. 115).

those of the love of Jesus ; and the Father accepted the Oblation and Holocaust of love and was unspeakably satisfied. Oh, when shall we, too, be set free from all the bonds of earth, and become pure offerings to His divine Majesty, sending up a sweet savour before His heavenly throne ?

### III

#### *The lovely Spectacle afforded by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the Temple of Jerusalem*

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph gathered together in the Temple of Jerusalem, the famous place where God willed to be honoured, where so many sacrifices had been offered to His glory, where so many of the just had gone up to pray ! And yet this Temple was but a figure of the holy humanity of Jesus ! How lovely a spectacle was this ! The Victim of victims who came to take the place of all those of the law was there for the first time, and although He was not to be immolated in the Temple, yet His sacrifice was really offered there where everything was a type of His immolation. When Jesus drew near the Sanctuary and sent up His first look of love and adoration to the Father, when from His inmost heart arose the

praise He offered to God's infinite Majesty, how much did the fulfilment of all that had been prefigured by the Temple sacrifices redound to the glory of His thrice Holy Father ? And how high an honour was it for this celebrated place ! Never was there any glory to match the invisible glory with which it was clothed ! Formerly, when this same Temple which had been destroyed at the time of the Babylonish captivity, was rebuilt by Zerobabel, many of the priests and Levites and chiefs who had seen the first Temple, and who now saw the less fair proportions of the second, uttered loud lamentations.<sup>1</sup> They only saw what was before their eyes ; but how great would have been their joy had they been able to look into the future, and to see like Abraham "the day of Jesus Christ," and to know the glory and magnificence of the new Temple, when the great Victim Jesus would come to offer Himself in it by the hands of His immaculate Mother !

And the holy Mother, too, was the honour and glory of the Temple she was visiting. Of old, the Ark of the Covenant had been its most precious treasure ; but the true Ark of the Covenant, of which the first was but a figure, was Mary. She had borne within her Him

<sup>1</sup> 1 Esdras iii. 12.

who is the true Manna come down from heaven, and she had manifested Him to the world at Bethlehem, *the house of bread*, and now she was bringing Him into the Temple which no longer possessed any of the symbolic manna.

And with Mary was St. Joseph, the worthy representative of all the souls who through all the ages were to worship God in sincerity and truth. For, if it be true that the Temple constantly resounded with the praises of God, Jesus was thus to reproach the Jews in the name of His heavenly Father : "This people honoureth Me with their lips : but their heart is far from Me."<sup>1</sup> The Father sought for those who worshipped Him in spirit and in truth. Of these was St. Joseph, who was the most beloved of all the worshippers of the Father after Jesus and Mary. How lovingly did he unite with the divine Victim and with her whom he had a right to call his Bride ! How were these three hearts but one, or rather, how were these three victims but one single Victim ! In the Temple was an altar which was called the altar of Incense. Every morning the priest had to cast into the fire burning on the altar an aromatic compound called Thymiana ; it

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xv. 8.

was a happy mixture of various sweet-swelling materials which blended their odours as they burnt, and filled the Holy Place with perfume.<sup>1</sup> But the perfect Thymiana, compounded of the sweetest perfumes, was in reality now these three hearts, blending together their holy affections, praises, and prayers, and their common Oblation to the heavenly Father ; and all the Temple, that is to say, heaven itself, the true Temple of God, was perfumed with the savour of their sacrifice.

O Jesus ! O Mary ! Oh, that I might worship and praise and supplicate like you ! Would that I might have your perfect spirit of a Victim, when I go into the House of God ! Could I only have the outward recollection and inward fervour, which you had and showed in the mystery of the Purification ! How far am I from being a perfect worshipper in spirit and in truth ! Would that I might be so, and that thus the sacrifice of my whole being might ascend towards the heart of my heavenly Father with a savour of sweetness, until I shall be able to offer myself as a spotless sacrifice in heaven itself, the Temple of His eternal glory.

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxx. 34.

## XVIII

### THE MYSTERY OF OUR LORD'S OBLATION OF HIMSELF IN THE TEMPLE

#### I

##### *The Reason of our Lord's external and public Oblation of Himself in the Temple*

In meditating on the mystery of the Incarnation, we noted that the oblation of Himself to His heavenly Father, while He was in Mary's womb, was the first act of the mortal life of Jesus. This oblation, however, was made without any witness. It was altogether interior. But, for various reasons it was fitting that His oblation should also be outward ; and these reasons are what we now have to consider, for they will furnish us with special incentives for admiring and adoring the wisdom of God and the holy dispositions of the incarnate Word.

First, it was fitting that an outward oblation of Jesus should take place in the Temple, because such was the ordinance of His heavenly

Father, who had expressly commanded that every first-born child should be offered in the presence of a priest of the law, and with special ceremonies. But, we saw how the divine command especially applied to our Lord, because He was the first-born of all creatures, and because His oblation was certainly the one to which His heavenly Father was most propitious, since more than any other it most wonderfully and worthily expressed His rule over all His creatures.

Next, it was fitting that the oblation of Jesus should not be inward only, because oblation is an exercise of a faculty for worship. But this faculty is exercised not only inwardly, it is manifested outwardly, and gives rise to external worship, which is as much due to God as inward worship. And this is why our Lord came among us to give His Father all that is due to Him and to be both inwardly and outwardly the perfect worshipper of His Father, whether it be to fulfil His duty to His Father or to enlighten us with His example, and this is why He willed to be carried into the Temple in Mary's hands, governing all the procedure of His holy Mother ; and He discharged all the obligations of external worship by the different acts of

Mary and St. Joseph, and by the way in which they behaved in the circumstances.

Thirdly, Jesus came into the world to found His Church. This was in a manner the final purpose of His mysteries, of the Redemption, of the Blood He shed on the Cross, as St. Paul says very beautifully.<sup>1</sup> But, one of the great marks of the Church was to be her visibility, that is to say a condition of association the existence of which could be sensibly perceived, and not merely an inward and altogether spiritual society, as is taught by certain heretics. But, this visible Church had to possess a visible sacrifice, a sacrifice which was not only inward and spiritual. And this is why our Lord first of all made His oblation invisibly and in secret in His Mother's womb, and then renewed it outwardly in the Temple, thus announcing what was to be the character of His sacrifice in His Church, and what was to be the character of that Church herself.

Fourthly, amongst the intentions of Jesus in the Sacrifice which He was going to offer upon earth and to continue in the Church, and

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 25-27. *Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et semetipsum tradidit pro ea, ut illam sanctificaret . . . ut exhiberet ipse sibi gloriosam Ecclesiam.*

even in heaven, was that of fulfilling all that had been prefigured by the sacrifices of the law in the Old Testament. There, all was figure, and He Himself was the reality. But it was fitting that this characteristic of His life should come out in the plainest possible manner. And therefore, as in the Old Law, sacrifices had four distinct parts: Oblation, Immolation, Consummation, and Communion, Jesus willed His outward Sacrifice to have these four parts, expressed by four special mysteries, and He willed the mystery of His Presentation in the Temple to be the expression of the first part of a sacrifice, Oblation. The Passion corresponds with Immolation, the Resurrection with the Consummation, and the Ascension with the Communion, as we shall see later on.

Not only had the sacrifices under the Old Law, if we regard them in a general way, four parts which were to be reproduced in the one Sacrifice of the one Victim of God, our Lord Jesus Christ; but there was one particular sacrifice which proclaimed in a more telling way a particular part of our Lord's sacrifice. Now, with regard to the Oblation of our Lord in the Temple, it is the morning sacrifice commanded by God, consisting in the immolation

of a lamb of a year old, which is prophetic of it. Thus, indeed, have the Fathers and commentators understood it.<sup>1</sup>

We now see why the divine Victim came to the Temple, borne there in the hands of His Blessed Mother. He had to appear openly to all as a Victim ; for this purpose He had to be set apart in public ; and, although He could not withdraw from being wholly immolated to the Father for our salvation, yet thus was His undertaking more solemnly and irrevocably ratified. For not only did He offer Himself openly and outwardly in the Temple, but there were now witnesses to take note of His pledge to be a Victim for ever. Mary is told that a sword of sorrow will pierce her soul when her Son is sacrificed ; Joseph gives the two young doves or pigeons which proclaim that His immolation is only deferred ; Simeon utters his hymn on seeing Him who is the Redemption of Israel ; the holy widow Anne blesses the Lord, telling of the same Redemption to all “those who are waiting for it” ; and these, too, bear witness to the mystery just fulfilled in the Temple. Jesus is a Victim for ever.

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxviii. 3. See Cornelius à Lapide on this, and on Luke ii. 23.—St. Bernard, *Serm. III. in Purif. B.M.V.*

O Victim infinitely needed by the world ! Without Thee there would be nought but eternal damnation. Be Thou ever blessed and praised for the resolution made by Thee in Thy Blessed Mother's womb and now confirmed, the resolution to immolate Thyself for our redemption and salvation. God the Father accepted Thy offering ; Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and the rest of the just who were in the Temple have also accepted it on behalf of all men. Complete Thy work of mercy by applying to us the merits of Thine Oblation and Sacrifice, so that we may be eternally victims with Thee.

## II

*The Dispositions with which Jesus offers Himself to God the Father in the Temple*

Let us now enter into the inner sanctuary of the spirit of Jesus, an infinitely more wonderful sanctuary than the Temple where His Oblation was made, infinitely more well-pleasing to God, infinitely holier, and truly adorable in itself ; and let us see if we may draw near without trembling and dying to this shrine of heavenly secrets ; let us try to discover what were the dispositions with which our divine Victim offered Himself to God.

What appears in the first place in Jesus in this mystery is His deep abasement before the Majesty and for the honour of His heavenly Father. He comes to the Temple, and He is the glory of the Temple ; all around Him He spreads gladness and life. Simeon and Anne, and all those who were waiting for the redemption of Israel, manifest interior feelings inspired by Him. And He alone who is the origin of all this joy is as it were buried in nothingness. He does not speak. He gives hardly any sign of life ; He is apparently helpless ; and to the sight of ordinary folk He looks like an ordinary child who has made his mother unclean, and who owes his redemption to the death of two poor birds and the five shekels which have been paid on his behalf. O mystery ! And Jesus is satisfied with this humiliation and state of abjection ! He knows that nothing glorifies the infinite Majesty of God like the humiliation of His creature, and that is why He abases and annihilates in this fashion the human life He took upon Himself on coming into the world in order to sacrifice it entirely to the glory of His heavenly Father.

One day He is to lose it by a shameful death on the Cross, but even now He would make

this absolute immolation to His Father ; and in a manner He makes use of all that takes place around Him to stir up in His own Heart a more ardent desire for His Father's glory and deeper humiliation. When the five skekels are paid to the priest, He joyfully thinks of the day when He will be condemned to death after being cruelly betrayed and given up for thirty pieces of silver. When the two young doves are slain and bathed in their blood, He feels all the more inflamed with the desire of which He afterwards spoke to His Apostles : "I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptized : and how am I straitened until it be accomplished ?"<sup>1</sup> When Simeon speaks to Mary of His Passion (and it is He who inspires the holy man thus to prophesy), His Heart is torn by foreseeing all the sorrows of His holy Mother, but at the same time He thrills with joy for the glory it will bring to His adorable Father.

Thus, humiliation for Himself, and glory and honour for His Father : such are the dispositions of the Heart of Jesus in the mystery of His Presentation. But that is not all.

Jesus was our Victim. He came to the Temple as much for us and for our salvation

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 50.

as for the glory of His Father ; or rather, He considered His Father's glory to be largely involved in our salvation. What a mystery of love ! "For us," says the Church in her holy Liturgy, "it was for us and for our salvation that He came into the world" (*Propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem*). And when this wonderful design of divine condescension has once been decreed in the counsels of the Holy Trinity, then all the mysteries of Jesus bear the same stamp. Jesus belongs to us, and we may even say that He becomes our possession in a new and special manner in His Oblation in the Temple. For God commanded the first-born to be sanctified unto Him on account of His dominion over all creatures.<sup>1</sup> This is why Jesus is offered, and also ransomed at the same time. What is the meaning of this offering and of this ransoming ? The oblation puts Him entirely in His Father's hands for His Father's glory, and the ransom, as interpreters inform us, in a manner puts Him into our hands.<sup>2</sup> And thus it is that He belongs to the Father, and also belongs to us, and that all that He does henceforth

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *Élévations sur les Mystères*, XVIIIth Week, 2nd Mystery.

will be for us as well as for the Father's glory: prayers, sufferings, tears, toils, and His public ministry, His Passion and Death on the Cross, and, after His Death, His Resurrection and Ascension, and the founding of the Church, and the giving of the Holy Ghost, and the Real Presence until the end of all the ages.

O Jesus! when shall we have hearts to understand and to feel all Thy love for our souls? When shall we come to a deep spiritual knowledge of Thy riches, and know Thee as our All and our only Good? When we once appreciate all Thy love and mercy, we shall be no longer lukewarm or unfaithful, but as Thou art all unto us and all our own, we shall have the happiness of being all Thine. Such, indeed, is the most desirable state for us to be in as exiles in this life in which we have to prepare ourselves for the life of heaven, where God in Jesus will be all within us, and where we shall be all in God.

## III

*How each one of us is presented in the Temple  
and made an Oblation when we are Baptized*

We also have had our part in a Presentation in the Temple, our whole life and being have been made an oblation to God, and we have been sanctified as sacrifices and victims unto God the Father in the spirit of Jesus. This occurred on the day of our Baptism. We were carried into the church, and we were then in a state which, under the Old Law, made a child's mother unworthy to touch anything holy and to enter into the sanctuary. We were in sin, and the devil was in us, and he seemed to possess us as belonging to him. And this is why the priest had to begin by driving him out of our souls with fearful threatenings. Then the priest took possession of us in God's name, laying his hand upon our head, and he made the sign of the Cross upon our brow and breast "that we might become temples of God."<sup>1</sup> And, when he anointed us with the holy oil of the Catechumens and with the holy Chrism, this meant the same thing.

Then we were baptized, and so our consecration was complete. We became truly temples

<sup>1</sup> *Rituale Romanum*, Baptismal Ceremonies.

of the living God. But what was the victim which was to be ceaselessly immolated in this temple? It was ourselves, and it is we who are bidden to offer and immolate the victim. Hence, in virtue of our Baptism we were at the same time sanctified as temples of God, priests of God, and victims of God. Thus write St. Peter and St. Paul in their epistles, and the Fathers of the Church in their works. St. Paul often says: "Know you not that you are the temple of God?"<sup>1</sup> and St. Peter goes on: "You are a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. . . . You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood."<sup>2</sup> This is why St. Jerome calls Baptism the priestly ordination of the laity.<sup>3</sup>

Sanctified to be sacrifices with Jesus and like Jesus at the beginning of our lives, what can our whole lives be but those of victims ever mindful of their nothingness in the presence of Him to whom they are offered? As victims, we shall desire nothing, be eager for nothing, and aim at nothing but the interests

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 5-9.

<sup>3</sup> See the quotations from the Fathers in *l'Union à N.S. J.-C. dans sa vie de Victime*, chap. iii.

of our infinite God ; we shall set ourselves steadfastly to procure His glory in every way, and first of all within ourselves by the triumph of His grace, that is to say, by fulfilling His will and good pleasure.

Happy is he who thus understands his life in this world ! Happy is he who thus enters into all the spirit of the mystery of the Presentation ! If at the beginning of life we have had the blessing of being carried into church, there to be offered and sanctified unto God as victims by Baptism, we owe it to the Presentation and Oblation of Jesus ; we should have never been offered, or else our oblation would never have been well-pleasing unto God, had not Jesus been the first to be offered, and had He not offered us at the same time as He offered Himself. For the sum and substance of the mystery of the Presentation and Oblation of Jesus is this, that he offers Himself, and that He offers us in Himself and with Himself, and that we ought to enter into this oblation and join in it as in the only perfect worship required of us by God.

“‘ It is a true saying,’ ” says the great Apostle, “‘ and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ’ ; and that in order to save mankind He willed

to be their Victim. But, owing to the oneness of His mystical Body, since the Head is immolated, all the members, too, must become living sacrifices ; and this is why St. Augustine says that the Catholic Church teaches daily by the Sacrifice she offers, that she, too, must offer herself with Christ Jesus who is her Victim ; because He has so ordained it that none can take part in His Sacrifice unless he sanctify himself in Him and through Him to be an acceptable sacrifice.

“ Since this truth is so important, and since it is the chief basis upon which is founded the worship offered by the faithful to God under the New Covenant, our Saviour has been pleased to give us a beautiful proof of it in the very beginning of His life in the mystery we are now considering.

“ Let us, then, by faith join to-day with Jesus Christ, so that we may be presented to God in Him and by Him to become truly the Father’s possession, and to give ourselves up to the fulfilment of His just and sovereign will. Let us enter into all the feelings of the Lord Jesus, and, joining in His Oblation, let us say to Him with steadfast faith : O Jesus ! what kind of a victim wouldest Thou have me to be ?

Wouldest Thou have me to be consumed and annihilated before Thy Father by the martyrdom of a holy love ? Wouldest Thou have me to be a victim for sin by the holy austerities of penance, or a peaceful and eucharistic victim with a heart touched by Thy blessings, exhaling nothing but thankfulness, and distilling love in Thy sight ? Wouldest Thou have me immolated in charity, distributing all my goods for the feeding of the poor, or a brother of sincerity and beneficence giving himself up to the service of his fellow-Christians, spending myself in instructing the ignorant, and in helping the sick ? Here am I, ready to offer myself, to sacrifice myself, provided that it be along with Thee, since with Thee I can do all things, and I shall be happy to offer myself by Thee and in Thee to God Thy Father.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Elévations sur les Mystères* (xviii, 2), and *Sermon pour la fête de la Purification*.

## XIX

### ON SIMEON'S WORDS TO MARY : " AND THY OWN SOUL A SWORD SHALL PIERCE "

#### I

##### *The Greatness of Mary's first Sorrow*

JESUS came into the world not only to be our Victim, but also to immolate along with Himself in His one Sacrifice all souls of goodwill who receive the grace of His Redemption with faithfulness. Now, His holy Mother for many reasons was foremost among these. And this is why she was the first to be drawn into the burning flames of His Holocaust. We saw how at the beginning of His Incarnation Jesus communicated His sacrificial spirit in a pre-eminent manner to Mary. And from that time onward during the nine months before His birth at Bethlehem, and for forty days afterwards, this mysterious communication increased more and more. But it took place invisibly. Now, Jesus seems to have desired at the Presentation in the Temple to unite His holy Mother with His

Sacrifice in an outward manner, and as it were officially ; just as He had desired Himself in this mystery to make His invisible Oblation to the Father outward and perceptible. And this is why He enlightens the mind of the aged Simeon with divine illumination, and inspires him to say : " And thy own soul a sword shall pierce."

At that very moment, according to the common opinion of the holy Doctors, Mary saw the Passion of Jesus more plainly than before, and what it would mean to her in the way of suffering. Hence, these words of Simeon (together with their context which we shall soon have to quote) were a truly alarming revelation to the loving Mother of the Lord.

Let us endeavour to contemplate the immense grief of a heart so kind and tender.

1. Mary clearly saw the Passion of Jesus with all its sorrowful surroundings. The whole of the ceremony of the Purification and of the Presentation had been full of consolation and joy until the moment of Simeon's prophecy. The holy old man had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost had promised him that he should see the Lord's Christ before his death, and now he had had

the ineffable happiness of carrying Jesus in his arms, and he had sung the hymn in which the Holy Child is called “the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel.” Hence Mary had but to hope and wait for all men’s blessings upon her beloved Child. And St. Luke expressly tells us that His (adopted) “father and His Mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning Him.”<sup>1</sup>

But—strange to say—immediately afterwards, and without anything to break the shock, the holy elder blesses Joseph and Mary, and says to Mary the Mother of Jesus: “Behold this Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted, and thy own soul a sword shall pierce.”<sup>2</sup>

What a prophecy is this! What a future does it announce to the Mother of the Holy Child! From this moment, the sorrowful mystery of the Cross will be ever present to her mind. Did she see clearly in her mind’s eye all the scenes of the Passion unceasingly, as some writers tell us, or had she only a general apprehension? This we cannot say, but it is enough to know that some such view of the Passion and sufferings of her dear Child

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 34 immediately following.

never afterwards left her. Mary was not weak and inconstant like ourselves. We are easily distraught by the happenings of life. Any moral grief weakens in us the sorrowful impressions we have just experienced. In any case, through the fatherly ordering of divine Providence time heals and mitigates the bitterness of our grief. But in Mary, the sword which had once pierced her soul was to remain ; and neither time nor the circumstances of life were to assuage her vast sorrow nor to turn aside her unspeakable sadness of soul. What a state of suffering and perpetual martyrdom was hers !

2. But before he spoke of the sword, the aged Simeon appears to have prepared the way for the blow with these terrible words : "Behold this Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel." For their resurrection ? It was only natural to hope for this. Jesus had come solely for this purpose, which also was to bring glory to His Father. But how was it that amidst the chosen people there were so many, after all the favours and miracles wrought amongst them, to whom He would be an occasion of ruin on account of their unbelief and wickedness ? Were hearts

to be found so hard as to refuse His merciful advances, and as not to recognize His divinity? Were there to be some who would not listen to His teaching nor follow His example, nor comprehend the innumerable testimonies of His love? And was all this to be met with in the very nation of the Jews to which Jesus and Mary belonged, the very people to whom Jesus had come to proclaim the Gospel before all the other peoples of the world?<sup>1</sup> The holy Simeon speaks of ruin, but what is this fall to be? Jesus was to speak of it one day to the Apostles, when he foretold the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the people. Was not this terrible calamity what Mary then foresaw? The sword seems to turn about and about in her wound. Jesus will be neither known nor received by His own,<sup>2</sup> and to His own people His mission to mankind will be an occasion of falling and perdition! What a sad foreboding for His holy Mother's heart!

3. But Simeon goes on to say what is still more astounding: "He shall be a sign which shall be contradicted." Not only will His own not receive Him, but they will contradict Him.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xv. 24.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 11. *Et sui Eum non receperunt.*

They will take up arms against Him, and set hatred against His tender and devoted love ! What a fresh sorrow for the heart of Mary ! Jesus is to be unrecognized, and also unregarded, and this already is a strange and unfathomable mystery in Mary's eyes ; but Jesus is further to be contradicted ! Contradicted as to His life, contradicted as to the marks of His saving mission, contradicted as to His teaching, and contradicted in His merciful designs for the good of the world ! How far more incomprehensible must this mystery have been to her who so well knew the love and tenderness of Jesus, the ardour of His heart, and all the blessings and heavenly favours He came to give His creatures !

Alas ! Mary could already foresee the dispositions with which men would receive the Word who had become incarnate for the love of them. What treatment had the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests of the synagogue and Herod their King given Him when He was born, and when the Magi were passing through the holy city ? Was not their strange neglect already a kind of contradiction, a secret opposition to the mind and coming of Jesus, and to His office as the Messias ? They were looking for a mighty and proud ruler ; and

how could the Babe of Bethlehem be the promised Messias ? *In signum cui contradictur.* They contradict the first sign of his mission to mankind, His humility ; and they will afterwards contradict all the rest. Thus did the sword ever plunge more and more deeply into the heart of Mary !

Let us sympathize with the sorrow of Mary in her distress, and contemplate the dispositions with which she endures it.

## II

*Mary's Dispositions in this Mystery*

1. The first of Mary's dispositions in this mystery appears to have been that of the deepest and most loving adoration. When the aged Simeon revealed God's designs to her, she lifted up her heart to Him who is the sovereign Lord of all things. She adored His infinite dominion, lovingly acknowledging all its perfections and all its claims. This divine dominion showed its power in a pre-eminent way over the sacred Humanity of Jesus, and in an equally sovereign manner over the life of Mary. But, this holy Virgin, this perfect "handmaiden" of God (to use her own word

at the time of the Incarnation), knew all this in the clearest and surest way. And this is why she was all adoration, deep, loving, and calm adoration, for the supreme authority of God and for His absolute dominion. There was not the least impediment to her entire and universal submission of her whole being to His designs as to herself and as to the human life of Jesus ; she gave her fullest adhesion to God's infinitely wise and amiable will, and, in her lowly adoration, she loved it as her very life, as the prophet says : "Life is in His good will."<sup>1</sup> Oh, how well-pleasing to the Father must her adoration have been ! How her simple and universal acquiescence paid tribute to His divine dominion ! O Mary ! grant us a share in such perfect dispositions !

2. The second disposition of Mary for our consideration is her loving and utter abandonment to divine Providence. She knew, in fact, one part of the Lord's will : "A sword shall pierce thy own soul"; but there was also that of His will which was unknown to her. How, when, and where was the sacrifice which had been foretold to be fulfilled ? By what means was it to be effected ? What part was to be

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxix. 6.

played in the immolation of the Victim by the wickedness of men and by the fury of evil spirits ? How far could the perfidy, the treachery, and cruelty of those who had the power to put Him to death go ? How far would they be able to immolate His Mother with Him ? And when was this last immolation to occur ? To what height of grief would the pierced heart of Mary be raised ? All these details and circumstances were probably unknown to the Mother of Jesus in her distress. And so she abandoned herself without reserve to the leadings of God the Father. It was enough if the various circumstances of the Passion of Jesus and of her own Compassion were either directly willed or indirectly permitted by God: she was ready to yield herself up absolutely and entirely to His mysterious leadings, to the orderings of His Providence, which was ever holy and amiable in her sight. O wondrous and noble self-surrender into the hands of God ! Such, indeed, is the inmost disposition of a perfect Victim !

3. The third disposition of Mary's heart was doubtless an immense love for God and His glory, and for the salvation of our souls. This disposition of Mary's heart is to be met with in

all the mysteries of Jesus, and we have already had to admire it. However great her present grief and anguish may have been, however overwhelming and intolerable her tribulation might be hereafter, God's glory and the salvation of our souls were to be involved in them: and to Mary this end was all in all. O wondrous might of love in this incomparable Mother's heart! All would have to be sacrificed, the most dread designs of Almighty Justice would have to be accepted, Jesus was to be cruelly put to death, and her own soul a sword would pierce; and all these things were to occur in circumstances which were terrible; the prophet's picture of sorrow and distress<sup>1</sup> would be but a feeble image of the Passion of the Son and of the Sorrows of His Mother,—but the issue of all would be more honour and glory to Almighty God—but we poor sinners on the road to hell were to be saved and called anew to the bliss of heaven—and this was enough to make Mary love the sword, and yearn for immolation!

O loving Mother! O heart full of infinite love! O self-sacrifice beyond that of all men except the self-sacrifice of Jesus! And He it

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxviii. 23, and many other passages.

was, O Mary, who inspired thee thereto !  
Blessed be thou unceasingly in this land of  
exile ! Crown thy love by securing us the  
grace of blessing thee for ever in heaven !

## III

*How we should join in this Mystery of Sorrow*

There are three chief dispositions which enable us to enter into the spirit of this mystery of sorrow, and to derive fruits of grace from the meditation we have just made.

1. Whatever our present or future troubles may be, let us always adore and love God's designs upon us, submitting to them in all lowness and in a filial spirit.

Such is the example our Mother has provided for us ; and should we not be glad to follow in her footsteps ? And then, God's ordering is always so full of mercy and fatherliness ! "The very hairs of your head are all numbered. . . Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. Fear not therefore ; better are you than many sparrows."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 29-31.

Such are the comforting words of our Lord Jesus.

We are too readily inclined to think that God is far off, and that He only cares for us in a general way. Occasionally we are tempted by the fearful thought that our infinitely good God has somehow forgotten our needs, and that Providence has no existence so far as we are concerned. Let us have enough faith steadfastly to repel such suggestions of the enemy. "He is not far from every one of us," says St. Paul, "for in Him we live, and move, and be."<sup>1</sup> God watches over us with a diligence, a tenderness, and an indulgence which are worthy of Himself, that is to say, ever constant, real, and infinitely loving; and He is the cause and governor of all the events of our lives. Sickesses and infirmities, heavy losses and misfortunes, carelessness or hostility on the part of those with whom we have to do, spiritual or bodily troubles, all these things are, in a certain sense, the work of God. Amidst such trials some are directly according to His will, others form a part of the providential scheme, merely because they are allowed to occur through the various humours of rational beings; but all are intended for the

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 27, 28.

good of our souls, for it is written: "To them that love God all things work together unto good."<sup>1</sup>

Like Mary, let us adore and love God's good pleasure without complaining or sadness; let us adore it with joy if we can, because of the hope we derive from our faith; let us adore it with thankfulness, for the sword that pierces our heart has already pierced the heart of our Mother, and it is directed by the hand of God.

2. In certain special troubles, such as those of the heart, and all those in which the intervention of any being appears to us most repugnant and intolerable, wounding us sorely within, as in the case of perfidy or betrayal, let us still fly to the divine good pleasure, and let us take care not to cherish any grudge against our fellows. This is an extremely important and indispensable recommendation; for, of a truth, inward troubles are the most grievous and hard to accept in advance, and the hardest to endure after they have come upon us. Who has not known this sort of torture knows but little of the meaning of suffering. Moreover, the memory of such experiences is usually indelible. The sword has in a manner pierced the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

inmost depths of our whole being, and, though the wound may grow less painful, it will never heal.

In the prophecy of the aged Simeon, it is the last blow that falls upon Mary from the inspired word: "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." In fact, those who were to contradict, to persecute, to hate, and to crucify Jesus were not the heathen and idolaters, but the children of Israel, or in the words of St. John, "His own."<sup>1</sup> That, indeed, is the sorest of all wounds. It was the wound in Mary's heart; Jesus, too, felt it bitterly; was He not one day to feel in His Heart what David in prophecy puts into His mouth: "For if My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated Me had spoken great things against Me: I would perhaps have hidden Myself from him. But thou a man of one mind, My guide, and My familiar: who didst take sweet meats together with Me!"<sup>2</sup>

In such troubles let us lift up our hearts to God. Let us never allow ourselves to dwell upon the cause of our torture, on the astounding ingratitude of one, on the inexplicable

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *Lections v and vi, Off. fer. vi in Parascere.*

<sup>2</sup> Ps. liv. 13-15.

fickleness of another, on the quite unexpected hostility of a third. No ; creatures are full of such painful surprises ; but, in reality, "they know not what they do," they are the means of some mysterious and secret plan of divine wisdom ; and, seen from this point of view, we may treat their conduct towards us with respect.

O Mary ! win me the grace to be always gentle, merciful, and indulgent to all who injure me. May I endure the sword in my soul in the same way as thou didst, O patient Mother, that is to say, without letting my thoughts dwell upon my injurer, however cruel the wound he may have inflicted on me ; but may my heart be lifted up in deep peace and humility to God, who has only permitted the painful trial for the wonderful plans of His mercy.

3. And let our union with Jesus and Mary become ever more intimate and close. Let us not be isolated and solitary, when the storm of tribulation is brewing, and after it bursts upon our heads, when inward or outward temptation grows more threatening, and in this world all seems to be lost ; but let us take refuge where the darts of the enemy cannot reach us, in the

Heart of Jesus and in the heart of Mary, two hearts full of love, and ever inseparable.

We may well believe that when Simeon uttered the ominous words: "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce," Mary pressed her Babe to her heart with deeper love, and that at that moment a closer and more tender union was wrought between her and the Holy Child. A union of unutterable beauty ! To unravel its meaning will be an object of the contemplation of the blessed in heaven ! This union even now gladdens our souls in their distress as we think of the wound inflicted on Mary's heart by the prophecy of the aged Simeon. And this most desirable and amiable union is a lesson which we fain would master and realize in ourselves, in spite of the infinite distance that separates us in our impatience and lack of mortification from the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

O Jesus ! O Mary ! whatever be the sword that shall pierce me, I know it will not be as cruel as that which immolated you ; or rather, the very sword which should pierce me through is but one of the means of your Sacrifice. For here below we have to endure no trouble which ye had not to suffer in order to fit it beforehand

for our sanctification. Give me, then, the grace of loving all the sorrows which are destined for me by the Providence of God; and grant that they may make me like you and bring me to be near you, that I may be, along with you, a true victim to the Majesty of God!

## XX

### THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

#### I

##### *The general Characteristics of the Mystery*

LET us first read the account of this deep and strange mystery very carefully in a spirit of faith. It contains the most valuable and important lessons. The narrative is to be found in St. Matthew's Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

“Behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph saying: Arise and take the Child, and His Mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him. . . . And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt: and He was there until the death of Herod. That it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt have I called My Son. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 13-23.

“ But when Herod was dead, behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the Child. And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel ; but hearing that Archelaus reigned in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep, he retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming he dwelt in a city named Nazareth : that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets : That He shall be called a Nazarite.”

Such is the bare narrative of the Flight into Egypt. How bewildering it all is to poor human reason ! Here is the Son of God who has come into the world and taken our nature upon Himself for our salvation, and while He is still but a gracious and gentle Babe, men pursue Him with their hatred, and desire to put Him to death.<sup>1</sup> The eternal Word seeks to hinder them from committing this terrible crime, and that is why He takes flight ; He

<sup>1</sup> The Gospel assumes that Herod was not the only one to seek to put the Holy Child to death. It says: “For *they* are dead,” etc. (Matt. ii. 20).

might have resorted to thousands of other means, but He chose this, and His very choice seems to show that He is helpless against human wickedness and hatred. Note, too, the circumstances of His flight. It is dark, and the town of Nazareth must be left in all haste ; and, as if the Son of God knew not the plans of His enemies, an Angel comes down from heaven in the middle of the night to warn St. Joseph, the guardian of the Holy Child. Why was the news so sudden and unexpected ? Was it not foreseen ? It is an Angel who gives the command to fly, and, as if he were speaking to persons without any prudence or position, he says : " And be there until I shall tell thee."

O defiance of all human reason ! O plans of the Almighty passing all understanding ! *Quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicia Ejus et investigabiles viæ Ejus !*

On the other hand, how full of light is this dark mystery ! Thus did God the Father treat His own Son ; and thus, therefore, does He deal with the Church and His Saints through all the ages. The just usually have to undergo humiliation, and the wicked often win the day. Hence there is no need to be

surprised at the trials of the Sovereign Pontiff and the Holy See at certain periods, nor at the afflictions of the clergy and of many of the faithful. Sometimes they are threatened with death and hated with an invincible hatred. Sometimes they are obliged to fly from their fatherland and to leave everything, to appear to the public as guilty of all sorts of offences, as troublers of the national peace, as conspirators against the welfare of the state. And who can tell the end of such times of trial ? The hour is known to God alone. “ Be there until I shall tell thee.”

In such times as these, let us show a special devotion to the mystery of the Flight into Egypt. Let our faith thus become more enlightened and invincible, our hope more full of strength and courage, our patience and humility more firm and secure. Let us look upon the enemies of Holy Church and upon our own enemies as instruments in the hands of God. Unless they are fulfilling His designs, they are only powerless. Of the wrath of Herod we are told that it did but help to fulfil the ancient prophecy ; “ Out of Egypt have I called My Son.”

## II

*The Humiliation of Jesus and Mary's Sorrow  
in this Mystery*

How the Holy Child of Nazareth always appears as a victim ! How stamped He is with humiliation ! Here we are reminded of the victim under the Law. It was an object of general rejection, and in a manner of malediction. Jesus has to flee in haste ; He is driven far from His native land and people, far from the Temple. He is cast amongst the heathen after having to pass through the wilderness. For years He is regarded as a poor alien. He is the Light, but this light is put out so far as those are concerned upon whom it was meant to shine. He is might and power, and all about Him wears an appearance of weakness and helplessness. He is the Lord, and He looks like a fugitive slave trying to escape the chastisement of an angry master. Thus is the Word revealed amongst His creatures ! The humiliation of Bethlehem was immense, and that of the Circumcision was peculiarly hard and painful ; but here our God seems to reach a still lower depth. Oh, how abominable and how arrogant our pride must

be for such lessons in humility as these to have to be so frequently repeated for our sakes !

And just as the humiliation of Jesus in this mystery is extreme, so is the sorrow of His holy Mother unfathomable. In her Liturgy, the Church counts the Flight into Egypt among the seven Sorrows of Mary.

But how can we form any conception of this new suffering of our Lady ? The aged Simeon had foretold the sword of sorrow. Unfortunately that sword was not slow in piercing the heart of the holy Mother of God. Her suffering was manifold ; externally she suffered from the hasty departure, the length of the journey, the sadness of her sojourn amongst a strange and idolatrous people with its great privations. We shall contemplate these various causes of her sufferings in our next meditation.

“ But the most grievous part of Mary’s dolour remains to be told, and there is no one who can tell it as it should be told. We should understand it, if we had a revelation of Mary’s heart ; but even then we could not translate it into words. It was a mixture of sharpest pain, wounded feeling, distress so great as to seem unexpected, horror that

yearned to disbelieve what it saw, a cruel crushing together of all the loves of her immaculate heart. It arose from the vision of men's hatred of Jesus, made visible in this dolour. Beautiful Child ! wonderfully sheathing the keen grandeurs of the Godhead in that scabbard of true infant's flesh ! Was there ever anything so winning, ever anything so hateless, as that blessed Child ? Why should men turn against Him thus ? Why should the eyes of kings pierce the shrouds of His innocuous obscurity, like wild lynxes, and why thirst for the little shallow stream of His blood, as if He were a tempting prey for savage natures ? Harmless, helpless, silent, pleading, beautiful ! and men drive Him from their haunts as if He were a monster, heartless, tyrannical, blood-stained, with all the revulsion of great iniquity and dark secret crime about Him ! And she knew how beautiful He was, and therefore how unutterable was the sacrilege of that cruel exile, of that murderous pursuit, which only ended in exile, because God would not let it go farther, and baulked ferocity of its victim. She knew too that He was God, the Creator come among His creatures ; and although He has not interfered with them yet, has not even spoken to them, but has only

looked at them with His sweet face, they are tormented with restlessness, feel Him a burden, though she who carried Him all over the desert can testify that He is lighter than a feather, or at least seems so to her maternal love, and finally make Him fly before them even before He can walk. This was the welcome God has been waiting for, now these four thousand years ! Merciful heavens ! is not divine Love a thing simply incredible ! . . . All the loves in her heart were crushed !”<sup>1</sup>

Ah ! who will enable us to think less of our own sufferings, which are often imaginary, and to think more of the heinousness of our offences against God ? Oh, what a grace would it be if sin, the signal disorder, the greatest of all ills, were indeed the main cause, if not the sole cause, of our distress in this life !

### III

#### *The Dispositions with which we should take Part in this great Mystery*

1. Whatever may be the divine dealings with us, we must never take offence. Our Lord Himself bids us avoid any such feeling,

<sup>1</sup> Faber, *The Foot of the Cross*, chap. iii.

for it contradicts both His goodness and wisdom. *Beatus qui non fuerit scandalizatus in Me.*<sup>1</sup>

“All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.”<sup>2</sup> They are *mercy*, because in all His dealings with men, especially with the elect, that is to say, those who are faithful to Him, God’s sole end is their good in this world and in the next. If He sends them trials, it is because He desires to provide them with help to avoid sin, to expiate their past misdeeds, to acquire virtues to win heaven, such as patience, humility, gentleness, simplicity, scorn for things that perish, and love for the things of eternity. Clearly, then, such dealings do but bear witness to great mercy, and fatherly loving-kindness.

And these ways of the Lord are also *truth*, because however obscure and inexplicable and mysterious God’s dealings may appear to us, they are always infinitely wise and just, and infinitely worthy of our adoration and praise. When we read the history of mankind from the days of Adam, and particularly the history of God’s chosen people and of His Church, we are sometimes surprised to see the ungodly triumph, and the holiest causes apparently

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxiv. 10.

lost. Oh, let us take good care not to harbour any doubts as to the designs of Providence, which are always infallible, always careful in the slightest details, always able to draw good out of evil in a marvellous manner as soon as God's hour has come!

The ways of God ! Let us ever adore them, let us adore them in the past, in the present, and in the future. Let us be very careful not to be misled by erring reason. If others take offence, let us be steadfast in our faith and hope like Tobias of old.” “ He repined not against God,” says the Scripture, “ because the evil of blindness had befallen him, but continued immovable in the fear of God, giving thanks to God all the days of his life.” And when his parents and his wife upbraided him for his faith and hope in the Most High, he answered with tears, saying : “ Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgements are just, and all Thy ways mercy, and truth, and judgement.”

This truly patient and humble man had the spirit of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in their flight into the desert, when they were pursued by the wickedness of men, and still adored the dealings of their Father who is in heaven.

2. Not only should we not take offence at the ways of God, whatever they may be, but

we should also be convinced that His severity towards us is a proof of His great love for us.

Who ever was more afflicted than Jesus, and who was ever more loved by God the Father than He ? Here is the explanation of that apparent strictness with which God ordinarily treats those who are His own.

He loves them, and therefore He chastises them to keep them faithful, treating them like children who are never let off any punishment which may do them good. This is the teaching of St. Paul in the following passage :

“ Have you forgotten the consolation, which speaketh to you, as unto children, saying : My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord : neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth : and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you as with His sons : for what son is there whom the father doth not correct ?

“ But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers ; then are you bastards, and not sons. Moreover we have had fathers of our flesh for instructors, and we reverence them : shall we not much more obey the Father of spirits, and live ? And they

indeed for a few days according to their own pleasure instructed us: but He for our profit, that we might receive His sanctification.

“Now all chastisement for the present indeed seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow: but afterwards it will yield to them that are exercised by it the most peaceable fruits of justice.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us, then, love our Father who has such merciful intentions towards us who are so rebellious and ungrateful. Ah! how sweet will it be to see through all eternity how infinitely good and just and merciful towards us God was, when He made us share the bitter cup which was the lot of Jesus and Mary and Joseph, and of all the Saints!

“This every one is sure of that worshippeth Thee,” says the daughter of Raguel, “that his life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned: and if it be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to Thy mercy. For Thou art not delighted in our being lost: because after a storm Thou makest a calm; and after tears and weeping Thou pourest in joyfulness.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Let us, then, dwell in peace, humility, and confidence, putting ourselves in the Father’s

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 5-11.

<sup>2</sup> Tob. iii. 21, 22.

hands like Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, who abode so calmly in God amidst their terrible trials. However wicked and spiteful men may be they have no power over us ; hence, they can do us no harm unless God permit ; and such harm will only be allowed for some end of mercy, goodness, and wisdom infinitely to be loved and adored. If the gates of hell only knew what the end must be, they would take care not to assail us, because their attacks are inevitably defeated, if we abide in our Father's hands. But the powers of hell hope to make us let go our hold on the stronghold of peace and safety by their repeated assaults. They hope that in the thick of our trials we shall come to doubt the Providence and Love of God, and that when we are once cut off and as it were isolated from Him in union with whom is our strength, they will distress and discourage us beyond measure, and thus overcome us. Oh, let us beware of falling into this dire snare ! Like Jesus and Mary, and lowly Joseph, let us ever be resigned to God, entirely given up into the hands of His Providence, and confiding in His love ; and then we shall abide in peace, and this peace will be an impregnable stronghold.

O Jesus ! O Mary ! grant that it may be

thus with me amidst all the vicissitudes and contrarieties of this life. Is not this, too, an essential mark of the victim who intends to set himself along with Thee on the altar of Sacrifice ? On that altar, beneath the Father's eyes, in the simplicity and universality of his oblation, how can the victim allow himself to be troubled about earthly matters ? O sweet repose ! O quiet peace ! O calm and entire self-surrender ! O fearless giving up of self with no return ! When shall I be able to enjoy such unutterable sweetness ? When shall I abide therein as in a sure dwelling ?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxv. 3.

## XXI

### THE OBEDIENCE OF ST. JOSEPH IN THIS MYSTERY

#### I

##### *Simplicity, the first Quality of St. Joseph's Obedience*

IN all the mysteries narrated by the Evangelists our Lord is always the source of all the holy dispositions manifested by the various persons who take part in them. And thus, in the Flight into Egypt, where our divine Lord hardly appears, and where the mystery seems rather to have to do with St. Joseph than with Himself, Jesus does everything. It is He who alone is the source of Mary's dispositions, and of those of His holy Foster-father; it is He who fills them with humility, patience, and a wonderful self-abandonment to divine Providence, and with the lofty spirit of obedience of which they afford so conspicuous an example.

Mary and Joseph give themselves up to His

divine and sanctifying operation, and we see all the acts of supernatural virtue they bring forth. The same thing will be noted hereafter in the case of the Apostles, holy women, and others who play a part in the various episodes of our Lord's life.

In the mystery of the Flight into Egypt, our divine Lord willed St. Joseph to co-operate with Him in a manner altogether extraordinary ; and therefore we are now making his admirable conduct the subject of our present meditation. He, of whom St. Paul says that “ He was made obedient unto the death of the Cross,” inspired the holy Patriarch with an obedience the perfection of which we cannot conceive. Let us look at its main features.

First, St. Joseph's obedience is wonderfully simple. The word *simple* implies that it was neither complicated nor impeded by any sort of interested calculation. St. Joseph accepted God's command just as it was ; he accepted it peacefully and lovingly, without any murmuring.

Let us first recall the Gospel narrative :  
“ An Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in sleep, saying : Arise, and take the Child and

His Mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee.

“And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt. . . .

“But when Herod was dead, behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel. . . .

“And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel: but hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judæa in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep, he retired into the quarters of Galilee.”

How strange is all this! An Angel appears to Joseph *in sleep*. Why not rather sooner? As if the Angel and God who sent him could possibly have been unaware of Herod’s schemes! *In sleep*—yes, it is ever thus; on starting, on coming back, on going into Galilee. Obedience is helped by the means used by him who commands in conveying his orders to his subject. Here, however, the one who has to obey gets no help. What a strange time to choose! Night and sleep! St. Joseph only sees the Angel in a dream! And why is an Angel made use of when Mary, the Queen of Angels, was there?

when the eternal Word, whose life was at stake, was Himself present under Joseph's protection ? What can we say ?

Nor are the words used by the Angel less strange : "Arise, and take the Child and His Mother." There appears to be no care in the choice of these words. In other circumstances, the Angel said : "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take with thee Mary, thy wife." But now, all is austerity, almost harshness. The victim has grown to be inured to the most painful sacrifices. "Arise, and take the Child and His Mother." O Joseph ! incomparable in thine obedience !

And now, see what follows. "Fly into Egypt ; and be there until I shall tell thee." Fly into Egypt ! But going to Egypt means passing by Jerusalem where Herod is living ! Does not the command involve a rashness that may ruin everything ? Were it not wiser to withdraw to Lebanon or some other northern country than to rush into the hands of the executioner ? And then Egypt is so far from Nazareth. How long the journey will take, and before safe shelter is reached how many dangerous days must elapse !

"And be there until I shall tell thee." This

is the deepest part of the mystery. "Be there," thou, O Joseph, thou, O Mary, subject to Joseph, and Thou, O Jesus, subject to them both, "until I shall tell thee!"

And then, what says the Gospel story? It tells us quite simply, as if the calm deep peace of Joseph's soul had passed into the style of the sacred writer: "And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt, . . . and he came into the land of Israel . . . and being warned in sleep, he retired into the quarters of Galilee."

O deeply beautiful soul of St. Joseph! O noble immolation! O ineffable perfection of obedience! How far did he enter into the unfathomable humiliations with which the eternal Word was brought low! O good Father of our souls, draw us unto thee! Break off our bonds, our bonds of independence and pride, and draw us with the charm of thy wonderful obedience.

## II

### *Readiness to obey, the second Point in St. Joseph's Obedience*

The Evangelist writes: "And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt." *By night!* The

whole of this scene is heroic. Was no preparation required? Could not some modification be made to prevent waste? Could not some charitable neighbour be told of this or that, be asked to look after the poor workshop while he was away? *By night!* But what will the people of Nazareth think of such a hasty flight? Will they not make all sorts of unkindly remarks? When they know that Herod is seeking to put the Child to death, will not this running away in the dark look like a tacit acknowledgment of guilt? Do innocent folks run off and leave their homes like this before anyone has heard any rumour of attempts to find them and pursue them?

Nothing of the kind makes any impression on Joseph's mind, so calm and simple is he in his obedience. The Angel said: "Arise and fly into Egypt." The Evangelist adds: "And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt."

And, to judge by the expressions of the sacred narrative, St. Joseph leaves Egypt with the same readiness, when the time came for him to do so. "But when Herod was dead, behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land

of Israel. . . . Who arose, and took the Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel."

One never wearies of quoting such admirable words, nor of contemplating such noble conduct, so plainly set forth.

And the reason why Joseph's obedience was so ready is because it was so simple,—simple in the way already explained. God is the speaker, and that tells everything. There is no asking *why* or *how*, and hence there is no hesitation. Natural reason would have discovered a host of pretexts for waiting till next day, for putting off obedience. On the ground of prudence it finds reasons for avoiding submission to authority, and it skilfully manages to do what is right in its own eyes. There is nothing so much to be feared as this depraved spirit. It may lead us to lose the most precious graces, it may compromise our vocation, it may lead us to be wanting in essential duties. It is the cause of a host of venial sins, and it even leads us to incur the risk of mortal sin. St. Bernard clearly hints at its wickedness, when he says: "Get rid of self-will, then you will have no hell."

Lowly St. Joseph never knew what it was to be self-willed ; and, to tell the truth, the word *ready* does not fully express what his temper was with regard to the will of God. His obedience was not only ready, but habitual ; it existed and was brought into play even before the order reached him. And this is why the order was so perfectly executed as soon as it was known. Joseph loved every manifestation of the divine will with affectionate anticipation. He does not worry about the time, or the means, or the circumstances, or the consequences of God's will. God speaks, and he has not to deliberate in any way. It is the disposition of the Victim fastened to the altar of sacrifice : it belongs altogether to God, and is entirely yielded up to His good pleasure. The order, when it is issued, only consecrates its sacrificial state. Hence, it is not quite readiness which is the mark of his obedience, but a powerful and sweet manifestation of a submissive disposition which never fails.

Let us pay homage to our good Father and Patron who is so pre-eminently characterized by the spirit of sacrifice, and let us ask him to help us to share in it in all that we do, so that our obedience to the good pleasure of God may

be unfailing, whether it be revealed to us directly, or made known to us by the ministry of our fellow-men.

### III

#### *Self-sacrifice, the third Point in St. Joseph's Obedience*

If obedience be the true spirit of those who have entered into the mind of Jesus as Victim, and who aspire to be victims along with Him, it is plain that it must have a third mark, that is to say, that it must be ever ready to make all sorts of sacrifices. We shall now consider how wonderfully and nobly St. Joseph shows this trait in the Flight into Egypt.

Let us consider the departure from Nazareth, the arrival in Egypt, and the return to Galilee. In each we shall find sacrifice at every turn.

On leaving Nazareth, how many were his woes of heart and mind ! Nazareth was his own country, where he was surrounded with friends, and bound by love and sympathy to relations and others whom he respected or who had been good to him ; and here he had dwelt in peace in the quiet of his own home. All this had to be given up.

On the journey, how many were his privations and anxieties and sorrows ! To avoid Herod's soldiers, he apparently must have left the highways, and thus his progress was slower ; and then, was he always sure of finding some hospitable roof before dark ? How often the Holy Family must have had to suffer hunger, cold, and all the discomforts of such a hasty flight through unknown regions ! Often he had to ask the way, and then, how afraid he must have been ! Were not the emissaries of the cruel and jealous king already scattered along the roads of Judaea and Samaria ? What care he must have taken to arouse no suspicion ! When the Evangelist describes the first of the inner troubles of Jesus at Gethsemani, he writes : " He began to be afraid."<sup>1</sup> How could Joseph help feeling some such torment of dreadful fear ?

After leaving Judaea the Holy Family came to the wilderness between that country and Egypt, the sandy desert with its lonely wilds and haunts of robbers. There, too, fresh sacrifices had to be made. Though some legends relate miracles wrought on behalf of the holy travellers, such stories do not accord with what we know of God's dealings with our

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 33.

adorable Victim as told in the Gospel narrative ; and the mystery of the Flight into Egypt seems to be of far too austere a kind for such wonders to be consistent with it. Jesus came into the world to bear the sins of all men. Above all, He is a Victim of expiation ; and to this let us hold fast, and not be surprised if He carries Joseph and Mary along with Him in His sufferings and privations and pains.

At last they reach Egypt. But, in this far-off heathen land, they must have found nothing but poverty and destitution and neglect. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are only foreigners in need with nothing to recommend them. Joseph tried to find work, and apparently it was hard to procure. Yet they had to get food and shelter. Thus, the bread of charity and the lodging offered by compassion were all the help afforded by God's providence to those who were indeed the highest Treasure of heaven and earth.

After their sojourn in Egypt came their departure, journey, and return to Galilee. Everywhere there is poverty, hardship, and sacrifice. During their seven years' absence, what had become of their humble home in Nazareth, and of the ground around their home, if Joseph

had a little land ? It was as if the shadow of Calvary were already falling upon Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. "He was made obedient unto death, even unto the death of the Cross !" This word applies to every soul which yields itself up to the grace of Jesus Christ. Obedience has ever to fulfil its sacrifice on the cross.

Thus Joseph, though not present like Mary at the agony of Calvary, had his share in the mystery of the Passion. We have already considered how he had sorrowfully contemplated the Precious Blood flowing from the wound of the Circumcision. Now, the shadow of Calvary seems to lie upon his soul, and soon, in the mystery of Jesus Christ's twelfth year, we shall see how that shadow grows darker and heavier.

But, how admirable is St. Joseph amidst all the darkness hanging over him ! He gives himself up entirely to God only in the spirit of Jesus the Victim. How humbly, firmly, and lovingly does he tread the path of the divine good pleasure ! Nothing stops or troubles him. His obedience is simple and ready, it takes pleasure in sacrifice, and it rises before God as a burnt offering of a sweet-smelling savour.

O Father and Guide and perfect Pattern ! Obtain for us thy children the spirit of perfect

obedience that our life, like thine, may be a perpetual sacrifice unto our heavenly Father. Obedience is the great law of the Christian life. It alone sustains and increases sanctifying grace within us. Whether it submit to God's own inspirations or to those who stand in God's stead, obedience is the mother of holiness. It engenders sanctity in our hearts, nourishes it in them, and brings it at last to perfection. I understand these simple truths, O my dear Father, but obtain for me from Him who was called thy Son, and from her who was really thy Spouse, the grace to govern my life by these principles. For what good is there in knowing the truth, if I do not strive to practise it ?

## XXII

### THE MYSTERY OF JESUS' TWELFTH YEAR

#### I

*First: Jesus is separated from Mary and Joseph*

THE story begins thus in the Gospel of St. Luke :<sup>1</sup>

“And His parents went every year to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the pasch.

“And when He was twelve years old, they, going up unto Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and His parents knew it not. And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day’s journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.”

Such is the first circumstance of the mystery: Jesus is separated from Joseph and His Mother; He hides from them, and does not tell them

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 41-44.

where He is going. Here, we may well exclaim with St. Paul: "How unsearchable are the ways of God!"<sup>1</sup> Later on, Jesus hides from the inhabitants of Nazareth, and, at the time of His Passion, from the Jews of Jerusalem; but in both of these cases He is pursued by the hatred of those who want to put Him to death. Here He hides from Mary and Joseph, who follow Him only with their love, and whose sole care is to protect His life which is the world's salvation. Let us try to examine this mystery in the light of faith.

I think the explanation is as follows: Hitherto Jesus had only shown the weakness of His state as a child; now He acts as God. Indeed, this is the explanation He Himself supplies when He answers in all gentleness, but also with all dignity, "How is it that you sought Me? did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

This reply is, indeed, that of one who is God. The eternal Word had come into the world, and there He had taken upon Himself the form of a slave, as St. Paul says.<sup>2</sup> But the divine Person, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was the sole Person in Him who was called Jesus Christ. Now, this infinite and

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 7.

eternal Person, the splendour of the Father, who had done Mary an unspeakable honour by choosing her to be His Mother at His Incarnation, and to St. Joseph in choosing him to be His foster-father ; this eternal Word, who was so lowly and hidden, and even abject, in His humanity, ceased not to belong entirely to His Father, and to His Father's service and glory, nor to be also in His Father, whom He ceased not to contemplate as if everything else in the world were as nothing in comparison with His infinite glory and sovereign majesty. The life of the incarnate Word was altogether and essentially a life of incessant worship of the Father. The work of the world's salvation only came afterwards, or rather, the salvation of the world was only an end worthy of the Son of God because it contributed to His Father's glory.

But this great truth had to be brought out in one of the first mysteries of His life, lest His unutterable humiliations should prevent men from seeing the splendours of His divinity. For a similar reason He afterwards appeared in all His glory to His Apostles on Thabor.

We say that this great truth had to be brought out. Yes, for our sakes, but doubtless not for the sake of Mary, or of St. Joseph.

The Blessed Virgin knew the secrets of her Son and the purpose of His mission in the world, and, if she appears to be troubled when she finds Him again, that is not because she is offended by what Jesus had done, but she gives expression to the sorrow of a mother's heart at losing so great a good as the companionship of such a son.

Thus, the eternal Word, rising above all that is earthly and human, shows Himself busied with His Father's business, which is in a sense the sole end of His coming into the world.

But it must be added that in acting as He did Jesus had a special end in view with regard to Mary and St. Joseph. In this mystery He was not acting as their child but as their God, and it may be said—having regard to the fruits of grace which He willed to work in them—that He was acting towards them as a Priest, bearing in His hands the sword of sacrifice that immolates without shrinking and without sparing the obedient and lowly victim which yields to His authority and power.

Joseph and Mary at the outset had entered into the spirit of being victims, which was the true spirit of Jesus, and they were victims along with Him ; but they were this rather by uniting

with Him in His sacrificial state than by giving themselves up to the all-powerful spirit of Sacrifice with which He was filled. But in fact, they could not be victims along with Jesus except so far as Jesus in His priestly capacity immolated them to His Father's honour and glory. Only until now this sovereign action of His with regard to them had not yet been manifested, because what had appeared in Jesus was above all His lowly spirit of Sacrifice in all its helplessness, and sometimes in a state of abjection. In this mystery, on the other hand, the great High Priest comes out in the gentle Child of Nazareth, and exercising His right of sacrificial offering with regard to the two souls He loved most, and which were also the most fit and ready for sacrifice, Jesus plunges the sword into the inmost depths of their hearts ; He abandons them to the burning flames of tribulation and suffering, and thus, by an operation such as God alone can work, He unites them to Himself all the more closely by the very act which seems to separate them from Himself.

Let us adore this divine operation of the heavenly Word, the Wisdom of the Father, and the Author of all good ; and let us bless Him

for discovering in Mary and Joseph two souls so wonderfully submissive to His operations and designs.

## II

*Secondly : Mary and Joseph look for Jesus*

The Evangelist continues thus :

“ And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him. And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him : Son, why hast Thou done so to us ? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus, the divine Offerer of souls in sacrifice, in this mystery willed to immolate His Blessed Mother and the lowly St. Joseph. And He had achieved this. The last words of Mary above quoted show how deeply the sword of sorrow had pierced. “ Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.”

Let us contemplate this deep sorrow for a while. But who could ever fathom it ? After a long day’s journey, when families meet once more, Mary expects to find Jesus with Joseph ; but the Holy Child is not with His foster-father. Mary and Joseph look for Him anxiously amongst the other families and those of their

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 45-48.

acquaintance, and cannot find Him. They go from one little band to another asking questions with tears in their eyes and with fearful apprehensions in their hearts ; no one is able to give them any satisfactory news. And, in truth, it was impossible for them to do so ; Jesus willed to conceal Himself from His Mother and St. Joseph, and who could say where He was now ? What a mystery ! O fearful affliction of Mary and her holy Spouse ! What dreadful anticipations ! What overwhelming fears ! We may have passed through some such spiritual martyrdom, but we shall never know all the pain and anguish laid upon Joseph and Mary in the good pleasure of the divine Wisdom !

It was dark, and time to return to Jerusalem, and Jesus was lost ! How deep was the anxiety of that dreadful night ! How many tears were shed on the way back to the city ! Day dawned. They went in all directions, searching especially in the Temple, but Jesus still hid from them. O God ! how wonderfully dost Thou “torment”<sup>1</sup> those who abandon themselves to Thy grace ! The first day closes in darkness. What fresh trouble and what weariness of spirit, and how tired out in body are the two seekers ! All their endeavours have been

<sup>1</sup> Job x. 16.

in vain, and now no hope of finding their Child remains !

And what a night after such a day ! Where was the Child they had been unable to find ? Had the hour of His Passion already come ? Had the malice of men, after all the hate with which it had pursued the first days of His life, succeeded at last in overtaking Him, and was He now in the hands of Herod's son, Archelaus, whose name had filled Joseph with alarm on his return from Egypt ? Such questions as these, when one thinks of the tenderness of Mary's heart, make one's eyes fill with tears.

There was another source of sorrow and anguish. Neither Mary nor Joseph had any cause for self-reproach ; but even the most innocent are subject to sudden revulsions of feeling which fill them with overwhelming trouble as if they were guilty of some terrible crime. They do not see clearly, and they cannot do so, since they are only faithful to the grace and love of God ; but God allows such desolating terrors in order to build them up in humility and self-surrender to His infinite mercy.

Again, Mary and Joseph had bestowed upon

Jesus nothing but the most devoted love and fidelity. Nevertheless, since by the will of Jesus the sword of sacrifice had been permitted to pierce their souls, may we not venture to believe that some such dark dread as this intensified their inward torment ? "Might not Jesus have left them because in His sanctity He was somehow less at His ease than He used to be formerly in the society of those whom He had so highly honoured ? Might not His holiness have been in some way hurt by some infidelity on their part ?" What intolerable anxieties were these ! How the heart of Jesus must have bled for their bitter grief ! Then the second day drew to a close, and He still remained concealed from the eyes of Mary and Joseph !

At last, on the third day they found Him in the Temple.

Thus the torture of these two holy Victims came to an end ! Alas ! what are our interior sorrows compared with their trial, the overwhelming load of weariness, regret, alarm, grief and anxiety, unrelieved by a single hope of once more finding in this world Him whom they had lost ? The sword foretold by Simeon had smitten Mary and filled her with unspeak-

able pain, but what was it compared with the still more cruel sword of Jesus ?

The inscrutable operation of the Holy One commands our silent adoration : with a love that nothing impairs or affects and with unhesitating faith we must learn to love all His ways. Like Mary and Joseph, we must put ourselves in the hands of God. We must be sacrificial victims like them, and God must be well pleased with us, whether He encourage us with His loving consolation, or deal with us according to His justice. Of a truth, His love underlies all His operations. For, whether He plunge us in darkness or raise us up towards the light, whether He take us in His arms or appear to abandon us, He wills to fulfil His eternal plan, which is for our good and His glory. God is Love, and Jesus is the Sacred Heart full of tenderness and pity for our souls.

### -III

#### *Thirdly : Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the Temple*

The Gospel story then ends as follows :

“ And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking

them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us ? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.

“ And He said to them : How is it that you sought Me ? did you not know, that I must be about My Father’s business ?

“ And they understood not the word, that He spoke unto them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth.”

We might have expected the evangelist in speaking of this longed-for discovery to have told us something of the joy and great gladness of Mary and Joseph. No doubt this outward joy was very great indeed, but there is no mention of it. It even looks as if it was to some extent tinged with a shadow of their recent trouble. “ How is it that you sought Me ? ” asks Jesus, “ did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business ? ” And then follows: “ And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them.” God’s ways are always somewhat strange to poor human reason.

And now let us gather further lessons.

Cornelius à Lapide says on this passage of

St. Luke: "The soul who loses Jesus has to seek Him: first, with the sorrow and tears of compunction; next, with the greatest care and diligence; and it must seek Him in the Temple, that is to say, in prayer, reading, and spiritual meditation: lastly, among the doctors, that is to say, amongst the learned and holy, who can enlighten the mind and direct one's devotion."

These counsels are worthy of careful consideration. Let us now study a few passages of the sacred text.

Bossuet<sup>1</sup> says: "Note the words 'Thy father and I.' Mary calls Joseph the father of Jesus, for he was really not only the adoptive father of the Holy Child, but also His father by ties of affection and care and suffering. And hence Mary says: 'Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing,' for we were equally linked in sorrow, since though he had no part in Thy birth, he still shared with me the joy of having Thee and the sorrow of losing Thee. Still, as an obedient and respectful wife, she names Joseph first: *Thy father and I*, and yields him the same honour as if he had been a father like any other. O Jesus! how well is all ordered

<sup>1</sup> *Elévations sur les Mystères*, XX<sup>e</sup> sem., v.

in Thy family ! how each does what is required for edification and by good example, and has no regard for his or her own feelings !”

And here is another passage well worth remarking. Jesus answers His Mother, and the evangelist adds : “ They understood not the word that He spoke unto them.”

And here Bossuet makes the following reflections :

“ Let us learn that perfection is not involved in knowledge but in submission. So that we may have no doubt in the matter, even Mary is represented as not understanding the mystery of which her Son was speaking. She shows no curiosity, but she submits ; and this is better than knowledge. Let Jesus Christ act as God towards us ; let Him say and do what is high and inscrutable. And let us look upon His operations as Mary did with holy wonder, let us treasure them in our hearts to ponder them, and to turn them over and over in our minds, so that we may understand them as God wills, and in the way in which He wills.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus Jesus acted in this mystery of His twelfth year in the same way throughout. He acted mainly as the God of infinite wisdom, who is always free in all His dealings.

<sup>1</sup> *Élevations sur les Mystères*, XX<sup>e</sup> sem., v.

Nevertheless, we would fain discover in the darkness that surrounds these last words of Jesus some trace of His tender love for His Mother ; and here we simply put forward with all reserve our own idea, since we have nowhere come across the explanation we now venture to give.

The evangelist says : “ They understood not the word that He spoke unto them.”—Here not only Joseph but Mary is referred to. But, what were the words His Blessed Mother could not understand ? Jesus had only answered : “ How is it that you sought Me ? did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business ? ” Could Mary have had any doubt as to the question ? Did she not fully understand the mission of the Son of God ? No doubt she did. And yet the evangelist says : “ They understood not.” Here we have one of the secrets of the Heart of Jesus. What they understood not, and what Mary in particular failed to comprehend was *the circumstance* wherein Jesus was doing His Father’s business. St. Thomas and St. Bernard tell us what it was when they conjecture that, in the mystery of His twelfth year, Jesus had resolved to begin His public ministry amongst men. “ But,” says the Angel of the School, “ of old

the sun obeyed the command of Joshua and stood still in the sky, so now Christ the Sun of Justice stayed for thirty years in Nazareth in obedience to the word of Mary.”<sup>1</sup>

If this was the case, if Jesus inaugurated His public ministry at Jerusalem, if He ought now to have begun His mission to mankind, and if nevertheless, after uttering these words, He was subject to Joseph and Mary as an ordinary child, we may infer that it was the sorrow of Mary’s heart and the regret she expressed at being separated from Him, and therefore the immense yearning of her beloved Son not to subject her to any further affliction of the same kind, that made Jesus decide to change His plan of beginning His public ministry and to return to the obscurity of the lowly carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. Thus, too, later on at the marriage-feast at Cana, after saying that the hour for working miracles had not yet come, He changed water into wine at His Blessed Mother’s wish.

Now, what Jesus did not will His beloved Mother to understand was the plan implied in the words : “ How is it that you sought Me ? ” etc., and His change of decision out of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Nicholas, *La Vierge et le plan divin*, II, p. 381.

respect for her sorrow, and out of regard for her implied desire for more of His companionship at Nazareth.

O tender love of the Heart of Jesus ! How does it appear in His loving action ! As the Son of God He left His Mother and went to the Temple, and as the Son of Mary He humbly obeys His beloved Mother ; and, as if His whole life equally depended upon the two wills of His Father who is in heaven and of His Mother who was upon earth, He shows Himself to the doctors and He hides in Nazareth, and He hides without letting His Mother know that He is sacrificing the manifestation of His wisdom to mankind for the love of her.

Here all is wonderful, all is worthy of the God who ceases not to be the Word, the Son of God, and who, having become the Son of a woman, is pleased to obey her least wish. Thus all is to the honour of God, and all is also to the honour of Mary. And similarly, all is for our edification. Here, then, let us increase our adoration and praise and thanksgiving for the infallible wisdom and infinite love of God.

## XXIII

‘AND HE WENT DOWN WITH THEM, AND CAME TO NAZARETH: AND WAS SUBJECT TO THEM’

### I

“*He went down with them*”

IN these words we learn that Jesus left Jerusalem with His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, and going along one of the roads that *went down*<sup>1</sup> to the holy city by way of Galilee, He came to Nazareth.

But in the text there seems to lie a deeper meaning, which we will now consider.—Jesus went down not only by taking the road from Jerusalem to Nazareth ; He also went down in the mysterious sense in which He always sought out obscurity and humiliation.<sup>2</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> Nazareth apparently was higher than Jerusalem in position, for it was higher up the River Jordan, which flows down steeply from Galilee to the Dead Sea. They *went down* in the same sense as people *go down* from London to provincial towns.

<sup>2</sup> “He perhaps uses the words *went down* in a mystical sense.”—Bossuet, *Élévations sur les Mystères*, XX, viii.

mystery of His twelfth year He had shown Himself to men, and now He disappears ; He had revealed something of His divine knowledge, and He now becomes a poor and lowly workman ; He was apparently about to begin His public ministry, and now during eighteen years He is engaged in the commonest of toil. Of a truth He went down, *descendit cum eis.*

Jesus is always going down ; this He does all His life long. When He left heaven to come amongst us, He descended to abysses of unutterable humiliation. But when He appeared at Bethlehem, He seemed to have abased Himself still more, because if a child in his mother's womb is necessarily hidden in darkness, still a child coming into the world may be surrounded with honour and riches, whereas the Child of Bethlehem appeared in poverty and abjection.

When He submitted to the humiliation of being circumcised, He went down even lower than He did in the swaddling clothes and in the crib ; and the legal purification of His Mother cast deeper shadows upon the mystery of His holy birth.

The Flight into Egypt is so full of strange humiliation that we seem to catch a glimpse of

further depths of abasement than any we have seen before.

The whole of His Hidden Life is in the words on which we are now meditating: "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth: and was subject to them." He grows up, and there is nothing for Him but submission, concealment, and abasement.

When the hour of His Public Life comes, what else does He do but go down and try to conceal Himself still further? What can be said of His Baptism at the hands of St. John in the Jordan along with sinners? And what of the astounding mystery of the Temptation in the wilderness? O God! how unfathomably deep are all Thy ways!

But, doubtless the miracles that show His divine power will make the world attend to Him. The miracles win Him a few disciples, but they are of little consequence in the eyes of the most influential and enlightened of His contemporaries; moreover, they are often disputed or ill-understood, or even attributed to some diabolical power. His teaching is contradicted, His life calumniated, and His mission made fruitless.

At last comes the Passion with its prodigies of humiliation, which no mind, not even an

Angel's, could foresee ; and for nineteen hundred years there have been the surpassing humiliations of the Holy Eucharist !

O mystery of the divine ways ! But still more mysterious are the ways of our incurable pride, which all these humiliations fail to put an end to. Where, if not from hell, do we get our abominable tendency to wish to appear to be somebody, to plume ourselves on qualities we do not possess unless they are given us by God, and sometimes even on our shortcomings and sins, in order to win the esteem and approval of our fellows ? O hideous sin ! O astounding perversity of man's mind ! O shameful contradiction between the dispositions and the life of a God and those of His miserable creatures !

Let us, then, resolve never to pass a day of our lives without asking with prayers and tears for the grace to abide in the truth—that is to say, that being nothingness, we must come to love and to aim at being forgotten as the only thing really fitting for us. O annihilation ! O darkness that is our due ! O bottomless depths ! There alone shall I get truth and peace, and find the sweet companionship of my Beloved.

## II

*“And He came to Nazareth”*

St. Matthew explains why our Lord came to dwell at Nazareth: “That it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: That He shall be called a Nazarite.”<sup>1</sup> Obedience is everywhere the rule followed by our divine Redeemer. His Blessed Mother expresses a wish, and He leaves Jerusalem. The prophets foretell that He will live at Nazareth, and there He dwells.

The holy Fathers and interpreters of Scripture have much to say on the word “Nazarite,” applied to Jesus henceforward until the hour of the Cross, and they discover several remarkable meanings in it, all of them well adapted to our Saviour.

The word “Nazarite” signifies a man “set apart,” “holy,” “consecrated,” “crowned,” “a religious.” Such are the various meanings of the Hebrew. They are intimately connected with one another. Let us now meditate upon them, and draw such lessons as we can from their application to our divine Victim.

1. A man *set apart*.—This expression usually denotes in the Scriptures a man destined by

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 23.

God to some holy ministry. The Levites were set apart, because they had to serve the Tabernacle. St. Paul does not hesitate to tell the first Christians that he was set apart or "separated from his mother's womb . . . to preach Him among the Gentiles."<sup>1</sup>

But who was ever more separated from the crowd than our great High Priest and Victim to give His Father the glory which was His due? St. Paul says expressly<sup>2</sup>: "For it was fitting that we should have such a High Priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." The Apostle does not say *encumbered (pesare)* with *everything* connected with our race and nature, since He took upon Himself all our infirmities, but *separated (separe)* from sinners, having no part in their thoughts, affections, and works: "for" says the Apostle in the same Epistle, He was "in all things like as we are, without sin."<sup>3</sup>

If He was separated from us on account of our sins to belong wholly to His Father, let us separate ourselves from all sin, and we shall be united with Him becoming like Him, true Nazarites to the glory of His Father.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. vii. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. iv. 15.

2. A *holy* man, or *saint*,—that is to say, not only separated from sin, but full of sanctifying grace, filled to the full with the grace of sanctity.—This is another reason why this word is so well adapted to our Lord. He calls Himself “Him whom the Father hath sanctified.”<sup>1</sup> The Angel Gabriel in announcing the Incarnation to Mary calls Him “The Holy One.” And of a truth all holiness is to be found in Him, whether as God or as man, and there is no supernatural grace which has not its source in the fulness of our divine Nazarite, as St. John reminds us in the words: “And of His fulness have we all received.”<sup>2</sup>

May it please God to give us of His fulness according to the full measure of His will “that we may be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity.”<sup>3</sup>

3. A *consecrated* man.<sup>4</sup>—Here Nazarite has the same meaning as the word *Christ*. The name *Christ* signifies *anointed* or *consecrated*. But note the divine way in which He was consecrated. He was not consecrated by some ceremony after various purificatory rites preparing for the honour about to be received as

<sup>1</sup> John x. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. i. 4.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Judges xvi. 17.

was done in the Old Testament. But at the very moment of His Incarnation, or by the very act of the Incarnation itself, which was the union of the divine and human natures in the second Person of the adorable Trinity, His consecration was effected. O true Christ ! O divinely consecrated One ! O unrivalled Nazarite ! O perfect Priest !

O my Jesus ! Thou wast consecrated for us to the glory of Thy Father. Thy consecration made Thee our Mediator ; and the mediation wrought by Thy blood-shedding was our redemption and our salvation. Grant that in us there may be no impediment in the way of Thy loving mediation which Thou didst purchase at such a cost.

4. *A crowned man.*—Jesus was consecrated, and on account of His consecration He was also crowned. This we may learn from St. Paul. His consecration as Priest and Victim was what led Him to Calvary, and “we see Jesus . . . for the suffering of death,” which He there endured, “crowned with glory and honour.”<sup>1</sup> Doubtless from the very beginning He was King, and He needed not to win the title, but by His Passion and humiliations He

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 9.

merited that His own peculiar spiritual and essential glory should be outwardly manifested. And thus it is that He says of Himself after His resurrection: "Christ ought to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory."<sup>1</sup> St. Paul, too, says: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names."<sup>2</sup>

It was for us that our holy Nazarite was crowned, that after participating in His humiliations and sufferings we might learn that we have a share in His glory: for it is very sure that "if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him."<sup>3</sup> Let nothing cast us down, and let the example and triumph of our God be to us a source of irresistible encouragement.

5. *A religious.*—Now, Jesus is *par excellence* one who is *religious*. He is religious because He is a Priest, religious because He is a Victim, religious because He fulfils all the virtues of religion towards His Father in a most perfect manner, rendering to Him by a perpetual and

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 12.

fully worthy worship all the adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, and expiation which are due to the divine Majesty,—religious because He has but one thought and desire, not a single beat of His heart, not one outward act which is not to the honour and glory of His Father, religious by His most utter poverty, religious by His most perfect purity, religious by His most noble obedience. O perfect model of souls consecrated to God either by the priesthood or by religious vows ! O most wonderful Nazarite !

In our next meditation, we shall treat more fully of Jesus Christ's religion towards His Father ; but let us here pray for a share in His wonderful disposition, by which He was an ever ready sacrifice, whether in life or death, with no shadow of imperfection, offered in a fire of charity worthy of His holy Father. O most desirable of all conditions, towards which all souls who understand the meaning of what God is and of what is due to Him from all His creatures unceasingly aspire !

## III

*“And He was subject to them”*

Let us meditate upon these extraordinary words. They sum up the life of God upon earth during eighteen years.—Here are the three questions we are to set before us in the light and peace of prayer: 1. In what sense can our Lord have been said to obey Mary and Joseph?—2. What was the highest point in His obedience?—3. To what end did He submit in this wonderful manner?

1. In what sense did Jesus obey the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph?

It may perhaps occur to some that our gentle Saviour from His earliest infancy directed by His enlightening grace both His Mother Mary, and His foster-father Joseph, and that therefore, since He inspired the commands which He subsequently received from them, it is hard to tell how the Holy Child really could obey, since He was merely carrying out His own orders and suggestions!

The answer to the difficulty is easy.—The orders given by Mary and Joseph to the Holy Child were doubtless inspired by His grace and will; but to be quite accurate, it should be

remarked that they were first of all issued by the Father's will. And, if it be true that so far as He was God, our Lord had no other will than that of His Father, and that therefore, commands suggested to Mary and Joseph were His suggestions, we must remember that so far as Jesus was man He had quite another will, not indeed a contrary will, not an independent will, yet a will distinct from His Father's, as is proved by the humble prayer in the Garden of Olives : "Father, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from Me: but yet not My will, but Thine be done."<sup>1</sup>

But this human will, which Jesus had taken in becoming man, He only possessed in order to give it up, and He only used it everywhere and on all occasions to practise the most perfect obedience. He submitted to His Father's will, as if the only thing His own will had to do in this world was to obey ; and He yielded up His own will, whether the commands reached Him directly from His Father, or whether they came to Him through Mary as intermediary.

Thus it was that His obedience was real and most perfect, and that not only in appearance, as we might have supposed. Only He did not obey His parents as creatures, but so far as

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxii. 42.

they stood in His eyes for His Father, and their commands for the manifestation of His Father's will. Thus we, too, when we obey our superiors, should not regard their human personality and creaturely infirmity, but see God in them, since His will is manifested to us by them.

2. In what consisted the perfection of our Lord's obedience to Mary and St. Joseph?—What we have just said teaches us this. It was the lowliest, the simplest, the sweetest, the most grateful, the most faithful, the readiest, the completest, the most absolute obedience, the most perfect in every possible way. Each one of these epithets might be dilated on, but there is no need to do so. Mary and Joseph caused Jesus to fulfil His Father's will. And was not this everything to Him, since He had declared at the outset: "I come to do Thy will, O God," and later on He added: "My meat is to do the will of My Father"? O most lovable Victim! here is the altar, here the sword, and here the fire of Thy sacrifice!

And yet, the commands Mary and Joseph have to give are on such common affairs. Here is a plank to be planed, there is a poor piece of furniture to be mended, a small room to be put in order, or else there is a message to be taken

to some lowly family. O Victim of humility ! this is indeed the wood that befits Thy sacrifice !

3. Lastly, to what end did Jesus thus obey ? He obeyed to expiate all our disobedience ; He obeyed to teach us to obey. He knew that of all virtues inward and entire obedience, which is the real sacrifice of our rebellious spirits, is the hardest to acquire ; and He knew that "nothing is so profitable to a soul as obedience."<sup>1</sup> He was anxious to teach us this in the most effectual way ; He wanted to get us to resolve to enter upon this narrow way, and that is why the Evangelist sums up the whole of His hidden life in the words : "He went down to Nazareth, and was subject to them."

O wonderful Victim of expiation ! O Master who teachest us in such lowly wise ! have mercy on me in my pride and foolish vanity, and pardon my irritation when my independence is threatened by the will of another. O God whom nothing can resist, use Thy sovereign power once for all. Crush in Thy mercy all my opposition and hardness of heart, and make me in some degree like Thyself, O Truth, Wisdom, and Charity !

<sup>1</sup> *Nihil tam expedit anime quam obedire.* S. Aug., *Enarrat in Ps. lxx.*

## XXIV

### THREE MARKS OF JESUS' HIDDEN LIFE AT NAZARETH

#### I

##### *A Life of Prayer*

JESUS' life at Nazareth was one continual prayer. As we have already seen, all His acts in His Mother's womb constituted a most perfect worship of His heavenly Father. Thus it was with the mysteries of Bethlehem, and with those of the Presentation in the Temple, the Flight into Egypt, and the Twelfth Year. Never for a moment did the Victim leave the altar of sacrifice, and His interior life was entirely devoted to all the infinite perfections of His adorable Father. The whole of Jesus' life was, so to say, an anticipation of the Eucharist, an all-round mystery summing up all the rest, in which we adore Him as ever about His Father's business, giving Him the infinite worship and love which are His due, and obtaining for us all we need.

This adorable Sacrament, in the words of the prophet,<sup>1</sup> sums up all the mysteries, but perhaps the mystery which it best recalls is that of His worship of the Father in His hidden life at Nazareth.—Let us now consider the marks of this wonderful worship.<sup>2</sup>

1. It was *uninterrupted*.—Nothing could hinder the most intimate union of Jesus with the Father. Heart and mind of the Son of Mary ever turned in one direction. He worked hard as a poor carpenter: sometimes He was so tired out that He fell asleep; but whether toiling, or tired out, or fast asleep, His union with the Father was never interrupted; His prayer and praise ascended always. The same may be said of His meals, of His intercourse with His neighbours, and still more of His converse with His parents. What joy was given by the spectacle of the beautiful soul of Jesus to the Angels in heaven, and to Mary and Joseph on earth!

2. It was also *unvarying*.—It did not vary in fervour like ours. It was always worthy of

<sup>1</sup> *Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum; . . . escam dedit timentibus se.* Ps. cx. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> The word *religion* or *worship* specially denotes the supernatural virtue whereby the creature renders the Creator the honour due to Him.

One who was God incarnate rendering homage to God the Father. What a centre of love was the heart of Jesus! How burning was the fire of His charity! But its glow never increased or varied, because a Man-God could acquire no fresh perfection, since He always possessed all possible grace and holiness.

True it is that St. Luke tells us of the days of His early boyhood that "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men."<sup>1</sup> But this was only in the external manifestation of His unvarying inward sanctity. He was like the sun, says St. Thomas,<sup>2</sup> which ever glows the same within, but appears to increase or diminish in light and heat according to its position in the sky.

3. It was always *one*.—This means that it was single, free from all division, not made up of a succession of acts like our worship of God. We as it were break up our worship into parts, sometimes adoring, sometimes praising, sometimes giving thanks, and so on. But it was not thus with our Lord. A single sigh or look of Jesus was a holocaust, an entire act of all religion. Millions of isolated acts would not have any more value than His single look to

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 52.

<sup>2</sup> III, q. vii, a. 12.

His Father in heaven, and a whole eternity of similar acts would be no better. What a worship was that of our sweet Saviour ! What an example does He set us !

This is why we find in the Church those who, in their desire to unite with the worship of Jesus, leave the world, giving up all the business and cares of earth, and spending all the rest of their days in a life of solitude and contemplation of the perfections and operations of God. In our days such a resolve is hardly understood, but the eighteen years of the hidden life of Jesus, spent apparently in unprofitable inactivity, justify such souls. Does not Jesus say to the contemplative Mary Magdalene : "She hath chosen the best part" ?<sup>1</sup>

The Father in heaven in His infinite Majesty and adorable perfections and sublime works was the one object of the worship of our divine Victim ; but let us not forget that we, too, had our place therein. We, too, were the objects of the loving care of His heart in His prayer and worship in two ways : first, Jesus bore us in mind and wanted to set us an example in His worship of the Father, but He specially bore us in mind because He had come into the world for our salvation, and this salvation was

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 42.

constantly the subject of His intercourse with the Father. Doubtless, His contemplation was not only a resting of His heart in the bosom of His beloved Father, it was also a perpetual supplication for our redemption, and a perpetual oblation for our reconciliation. Jesus prayed, Jesus gave Himself up to His Father's justice, and He hastened as we may say the day of His cruel sacrifice on Calvary by the ardour of His desires.<sup>1</sup>

O eternally admirable and amiable mystery ! Always the spiritual interests of our poor souls seem to be the culminating point of all the ordinances and operations of our God and our sweet Saviour Jesus !

## II

*A Life of Silence*

Silence befits a worship so high and deep. Doubtless, it is not indispensable to it, for Jesus was not less occupied in praise, adoration, and thanksgiving amidst the crowd and in His greatest sufferings than He was in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. But there was a kind

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 50. *Baptismo habeo baptizari, et quomodo coarctor. . . .*

of harmony between the silence of its solitude and the loving uplifting of the soul of the Word incarnate to the Father. And, on the other hand, according to the Psalmist,<sup>1</sup> silence itself is a kind of praise of God.

How beautiful a thing was the silence of the Word in the presence of the Father ! It must not be thought that its peculiar depth made it an austere thing. It was higher and deeper than heaven above and the abysses beneath, but it was full of sweetness and immeasurable bliss. It must have been most profound, because the thought of the presence and of the infinite perfections of the Father could nowhere be so vast and operative as in the mind of the sacred humanity of Jesus. But this very silence was filled with infinite joy, because Jesus paid homage to His Father not with the simple faith that sees but darkly, such as we possess ; Jesus lifted up His soul to the Father in such a way as to be incessantly occupied with Him, and at the same time enjoyed a clear, unclouded vision of all His divine perfections. In all the episodes of His mortal life He saw the beatific vision of the Essence of God more

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxiv. *Silentium tibi laus.* Thus does St. Jerome interpret the first words of this Psalm. Cf. Bellarmine on the Psalm.

fully and distinctly than any of the Saints or the Cherubim in heaven.

Here are impenetrable mysteries which we can only adore, but we can conceive nothing sweeter than the life of immense silence and bliss led by the incarnate Word in the concealment of Nazareth.

Here, however, is another mystery ! This silence was not only filled with immeasurable bliss, it was also full of immeasurable sadness, because Jesus was able to see in all the light of His Father's infinite holiness all the hideousness of sin, and all the punishments it deserves, and the wickedness of obstinate sinners, and the fearful end of their obstinacy, eternal hell.

How full of anguish must have been the heart of Jesus ! How unfathomable, then, must have been the depths of the silence of Jesus !

But still, in the deep abysses of this silence, sweet and loving words made themselves heard from time to time. It was the harmony of the unutterably lovely intercourse between the three souls of those who were united in the holiest bonds that have ever bound human beings together on earth or in heaven. Thus were linked with one another, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. The silence was holy, and also deep ;

for true silence is to be found in the inner depths of the soul, and nothing but useless speech can disturb it ; but no idle word was heard here. In this circle the spoken word was but the ally of the inward silence. When Jesus spoke, what deep inward peace filled the souls of Mary and Joseph. When Mary or Joseph spoke, their words were only an echo of this deep and divine peace. Happy household ! Holy souls ! What a pattern family !

When shall we have our share in the grace of such a silence ? When will our words cease to disturb the inner silence of the soul ? When will they either cause it or issue out of it ? They can only give rise to it when God and the things of God are their subject ; they can only spring from it when they are humble, modest, and charitable, for such words alone are an evidence of the spiritual peace from which they proceed.

Let us be lovers of silence, whether inward or outward : of inward silence, because this it is that makes us fit to receive divine communications, the most intimate touches of grace, and the gift of contemplation ; this alone it is that makes souls advance most readily and surely in divine union. But it is incompatible with the

clamour of the passions, with the agitation of self-love, and with the perpetual stirrings of our over-wrought sensibility. All lack of mortification is contrary to it, and all vain curiosity vexes and distresses it. It will find a home within us only on condition of our souls being in peace, dead to all the human, and to ourselves. Let us aspire to the possession of so precious a grace.

Interior silence is a thing which is sublime. But it has various degrees. It begins in us according to the zeal with which we struggle against its enemies, and then it reigns within us supremely. Thus the soul becomes a picture of heaven itself.

Interior silence is one of the most holy works of grace. Outward silence is a preparation towards such a state, and sometimes it is an evidence of it.

It prepares for it. Who can fail to understand this ? Let us govern our words, keep our eyes under control, bear ourselves with modesty, and love solitude and retirement—of course with all due regard to the duties of our state of life. But in what household, and by whom have family duties been so well fulfilled as they were at Nazareth by Mary and Joseph ? What outward silence was theirs ! what modera-

tion there was in their words ! what modesty of look and demeanour at all times !

O silence of the Holy Family ! O sweet savour of heaven ! O sweet peace of the creaturely Trinity on earth amongst whom dwelt the Blessed uncreated Trinity !<sup>1</sup> O unbroken tranquillity of heart and mind ! O incomparable sanctuary of Nazareth ! O beautiful and delightful picture of the promised land of eternity ! When shall I be less shaken by the agitations of this world ? When shall I be able to calm the wearisome disturbances of my rebellious and undisciplined nature ? When shall I be so happy as to inhale thy sweetness, as to rest in thy peace, and as to live with thy life ?

### III

#### *A Life of Work*

Year after year Jesus willed to do the hard and lowly work of a common working man, because He is our Master and our Victim : our Master, who teaches us humility, and bids us shun idleness ; our Victim, who expiates our idleness and bears the penalty assigned to man from the beginning.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxv. 3. *Et factus est in pace locus ejus.*

1. Jesus is our Master, and first of all He teaches us humility. This is His eternal lesson, but here He gives it to us in a most remarkable manner. He is at Nazareth, and He does not quit His obscurity until He is thirty years old, and during the whole of that time He obeys Joseph and Mary ; and what is the main work of His obedience ? It is diligence in a laborious and inglorious occupation.

How strange ! “ Is that all the Son of God has to do ? ” Yes, all. He has nothing to do but to obey two of His own creatures. And in what is He to obey them ? In the lowliest of occupations, in mere mechanical work ! Where are those who murmur when their employment does not correspond with their capacities, or rather with their pride ? Let them come to the household of Joseph and Mary, and watch Jesus Christ at work ! We do not hear that His parents had any servants. They were like those whose own children go into service. Jesus tells us Himself that He *came to serve.*<sup>1</sup> The Angels were obliged, as we may say, to come to wait upon Him in the wilderness, for we nowhere read of His having any servants in His train. What is certain is this, that He worked in His father’s workshop.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iv. 11, xx. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiii. 55.

“It looks as if He lost Joseph before the time of His ministry. And this is why people asked, when He came to preach in His own country (at Nazareth): Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary ? as if He were the man —let us not be ashamed to own it—whom they had seen keeping shop, so to speak, supporting His Mother by His labour, and carrying on the little business on which they both lived.

“O God ! I am caught again ! O pride, come and feed on this sight ! Jesus, the son of a carpenter, a carpenter Himself, known by His trade, and nothing else mentioned ! In the early Church people remembered the ploughs He had made, and the tradition of this has been handed down to us by some of the most primitive writers. Let those who live by the work of their hands be of good cheer and rejoice in it ; Jesus Christ is of their company. Let them learn in their work to praise God, to sing psalms and hymns ; God will bless their work, and they will be in His eyes like other Jesus Christs.”<sup>1</sup>

And let those who have received riches at God’s hands, and who appear not to need to gain their bread by the sweat of their brow,

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Elévation sur les Mystères*, XX, S.

learn from the Son of God to flee from idleness, to take up some serious employment either on behalf of the poor, or else for the instruction and edification of their neighbour, so that their Father who is in heaven may not turn them away on the Day of Judgement, because they are not in any way like His well-beloved Son !

2. Jesus, toiling like a poor working man, shows Himself as our Teacher and Master, that we may learn humility and the love of work ; but He also teaches us this lesson as our Victim who expiates for us in this mystery.

Hard and distasteful work is a punishment for the sin of our first parent. When Adam had disobeyed God's command, the sentence went forth against him : " Because thou hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work ; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. . . . Thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken : for dust thou art, and into dust shalt thou return." <sup>1</sup> But the new Adam, Jesus Christ, who took

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 17-19.

upon Himself all the sins of the world and willed to expiate them, passed His youth and early manhood in the toil of a workshop. His holy hands handled the "saw and the plane," as Bossuet says,<sup>1</sup> and grew hard with the use of rough, coarse tools.

Let us adore our divine Victim in the trouble He takes to expiate our carelessness and negligence and the idleness of which we are guilty in the holiest work we have to do, the work of our own salvation. Let us adore with love, but with confusion of face and repentance, the holy sweat that flows from His brow, and the weariness which bows Him down. Alas ! when He carries some burden, when the sweat of His toil flows from Him, it is but a forecast of another and still more distressing mystery, when He is no longer seen in the obscurity of the carpenter's shop, but before the eyes of all the cruel throng, carrying His Cross on the way to Calvary with His blood to mark the track.

O hardened hands ! O expiatory toils ! O labour worthy of all adoration !

Let us love our work however overwhelming or lowly or useless it may seem. Let us

<sup>1</sup> *Elévation sur les Mystères*, XX, S.

love it as an expiation. Let us love it as making us like our divine Victim. As we do it, let us unite our thoughts, our feelings, with the thoughts and feelings of our infinitely lovable Victim ; and particularly, when the toil is an affliction and humiliating, let us rejoice because then it more especially reminds us of our God, and is better fitted for giving us a share in His sacrificial state.

Humble working men, and all kinds of workers, see how your condition has been ennobled by Jesus, and how it has been sanctified by Him, and therefore how easy it is to hallow. Let it then be your sole pride to be thus united with the Son of God, and your highest ambition to bear the burden and heat of the day in the same spirit as He did.

Whatever the vocation of each of us may be, let us be victims along with Jesus, in giving ourselves up diligently in a spirit of faith and of the utmost fidelity to the duties of our state. The fulfilment of such duties is always a toil to some extent, and often a troublesome toil, perhaps even distressing either to the mind or the body.

Happy is he who keeps before his eyes the divine Word, hidden in Joseph's workshop for the love of us, there spending His life in pain-

ful labour, and thus sanctifying all the labour and toil of this life! How sweet one day will be the invitation of Jesus, when He says to us: "It is time for thee to rest from thy labours"!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. xiv. 13.

## XXV

“AND JESUS ADVANCED IN WISDOM AND AGE,  
AND GRACE WITH GOD AND MEN”

### I

“*Jesus advanced in Wisdom*”

How are we to understand these words ? How did Jesus advance in *wisdom* ?

The word *wisdom* has several meanings in Holy Scripture ; let us note two in chief.

First, it signifies a kind of all-round perfection, both inward and outward, and therefore implies all the virtues, including true holiness. Thus must be understood a great number of passages in the Sapiential books of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, it stands for real knowledge, knowing all that should be known.<sup>2</sup> In our meditation upon this text, let us dwell upon these two meanings.

<sup>1</sup> See Cornelius à Lapide *passim*, especially in *Libr. Sapientiae*, quæst. 3. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

1. Wisdom in the former sense is synonymous with perfect holiness, and it is plain that the Holy Child could not increase in wisdom in this sense. In reality, from the beginning of His Incarnation He possessed in Himself all the fulness of possible perfection.<sup>1</sup> His holiness never increased, and although His outward and inward acts of virtue were infinitely meritorious, they added nothing to the supernatural beauty of His soul. Had He lived for long ages, and had His Passion been even more sorrowful and painful than it actually was, yet so high and so finished was His perfection of sanctity from His Mother's womb, that it could have gained no fresh excellence from all this.

Thus, *in reality*, Jesus did not advance in sanctity and wisdom ; but because the evangelist had to speak according to what appeared to the eyes of men, He says that Jesus increased in goodness. And indeed, *with regard to men*, he bore all the marks of true growth and real improvement. *In their eyes*, He grew in wisdom, because He daily gave fresh outward evidence of inward holiness, prudence, modesty, gentleness, and charity. And we need not shrink from adding, that He advanced also in the eyes of Mary and Joseph, because they

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 19.

constantly were discovering new charms and loveliness in the Holy Child. This will be the subject of another meditation.

O divine growth! O wondrous manifestation of the inward beauty of the Son of God! Let us adore and pay homage in the presence of these graces revealed in the Person of our Saviour. In Thee, O my Jesus, Child and Youth, I adore and venerate all the united perfections of the Godhead, and all the infinite and unparalleled graces of Thy created being; and I praise and wonder as Thou gradually unfoldest Thy spiritual perfection and beauty. Here is a feature of Thine infinite wisdom, which makes allowances for our infirmity, since we cannot endure any sudden manifestation of Thy magnificence; and it is a touching proof of Thy humility that Thou appearest to shrink from revealing all the divine treasures concealed by Thy humanity. Thus we are constantly taught humility by the least circumstances of Thy adorable mysteries, O Jesus!

2. And now let us turn to the second meaning of the word *wisdom* in the sacred text. It also signifies knowledge, so that St. Luke means to say: "Jesus advanced in knowledge."

Here again, to speak absolutely, there could

be no advance. Nevertheless, if the word *knowledge* be understood in one way, then our divine Victim could show progress and development. Let us now explain this.

In Jesus there are two kinds of knowledge of matters. The first is so perfect that it cannot in any way become more perfect. This is the knowledge He has as Man-God, and it arises both from the beatific vision—which implies the full knowledge of God and of all things in God—and from the essential perfection that belongs to Him, which excludes all defects, and involves an infused knowledge of everything. For “in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” says St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that such deep knowledge and wisdom cannot increase; and, if St. Luke’s words applied only to this, we should have to infer that the evangelist was only referring to an apparent increase. Jesus showing *in the eyes of men* more and more enlightenment and prudence in counsel, and perhaps more and more skill in His trade—O mystery of the humility of a God!—*appeared* to advance in wisdom and in various kinds of knowledge.

But we find a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews which corroborates the words of

<sup>1</sup> Col. ii. 3.

St. Luke, and thus we can apparently take the latter in a literal sense. St. Paul, speaking of our divine Victim in His Passion, says expressly, "Whereas He was indeed the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."<sup>1</sup> He learned ! Hence there is an advance of wisdom in Jesus. How is this to be explained ?

Even in heaven, and from all eternity, Jesus knew fully and perfectly the meaning of suffering, and of all that bears the stamp of it, such as toil, poverty, and humiliation ; but He did not know these things *by personal experience*. In reality, He had not been poor, or endured humiliation and suffering, until He came among us ; and however well one may know a thing, such knowledge is in some sort supplemented by experience. So it was this kind of experimental knowledge that advanced in Jesus. As the years passed by, He learnt by His own feelings the meaning of poverty, contempt, and destitution, and of having to earn one's food by the sweat of one's brow. Alas ! He who is the essence of happiness Himself has to learn the meaning of suffering and to experience the torture of the cross ; and He who is life has to taste<sup>2</sup> the bitterness of death ! And this is

<sup>1</sup> Heb. v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 9.

why Isaias says of Him: “He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity.”<sup>1</sup>

Here is a new mystery of love. This experimental knowledge really added nothing to the interior perfection of the knowledge of Jesus. He could only lose by gaining it, since He lost some of His glory in the eyes of men. But He loved us, and He was a Victim for us. By suffering, as the Apostle teaches,<sup>2</sup> He became “merciful” and more able to succour us. He was our Victim, and, to show us more evidently that He was expiating our sins, He accepted the part of learning to the full by daily experience a knowledge of humiliation and suffering, of which we the guilty unfortunately know little but the names.

## II

### *“Jesus advanced in Age”*

“What things soever were written, were written for our learning,”<sup>3</sup> says St. Paul. Let us try to find out the lesson we are meant to learn from this text.

1. “Jesus advanced in age.” He might have come into the world of full age, as did the first

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liii. 3.      <sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 17; iv. 15.      <sup>3</sup> Rom. xv. 4.

man when he came forth from the Creator's hands. Or He might have chosen a glorified state from the outset, a state which He took upon Himself later on after His resurrection. Such conditions would have been apparently more in conformity with His position as a Man-God. But it was not thus. One word which constantly recurs to us explains all : Jesus was a *Victim*. Now littleness, infirmity, gradual and slow bodily growth, all that bears the mark of weakness and helplessness, all this especially befits a Victim of expiation. Jesus was first of all a feeble infant, incapable of providing for Himself, and without the intervention of some miracle He might have died of hunger or cold, had He not been helped in the same way as other children are.

First of all, He was bound in swaddling clothes, and by degrees "He waxed strong,"<sup>1</sup> but could neither talk nor walk. Then He began to take steps hesitatingly, and then with more confidence ; and then He began to prattle, to hear the sound of His own voice, a voice of sweeter tone than all the harmonies of heaven in the ears of Mary and Joseph in their humble home ; but in all other eyes Jesus appeared to be but an ordinary child, doubtless far more

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 40.

modest and gentle than any other, though without showing anything of His divine glory and miraculous power.<sup>1</sup>

Then the Holy Child as He grew stronger was put to work. We say “was put” as if He did not set to work of Himself, because of the word: “He was subject to them.” He was now able to carry burdens, to handle a tool, to earn His living! He was fifteen years old, then eighteen, then twenty. St. Catharine of Siena loved contemplating Him at this age, and cries out in loving admiration: “O lovely young man!” Thus do the Saints break forth in the sweet familiarities of love. But how wondrous a mystery is this of a God, the great and eternal God, who has apparently come into the world merely to be subject to all the conditions of our human existence, and who advanced in age and strength and stature!

2. “Jesus advanced in age.” But to what purpose? It was in order to sanctify Himself in passing through all the stages of human life until full manhood; it was in order to win for us by His way of living all the graces we need in the early years of our lives, in youth

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, III, q. vii, a. 12 ad 3.—St. Leo, *Serm. IV de Epiph.*, ch. iii *in fine*.

and manhood; it was in order to teach us how to sanctify the various troubles attached to the succeeding periods of our earthly careers.

St. Irenæus tells us that Jesus willed to be a child for the love of little children, to help them to overcome their temptations, and to encourage them in the practice of virtue. But the same may be said of the purpose of our divine Master with regard to all the young as they pass on their way through the reefs and shoals of early life. They are often subject to numerous and violent temptations which have to be conquered, they have more important duties to carry out, work to be sanctified, a deeper spirit of prayer to be acquired, and lastly, a vocation to choose. Their future generally depends on the dispositions with which they pass through this critical stage of their lives. Now, Jesus advanced in age, and passed through these years in order to sanctify them for us, either as our Victim or as our Pattern, by His prayers, His patience, His humility, and His obedience.

Let us thank our gentle Saviour, the Holy Child and Youth of Nazareth, our God and Victim. He was born and grew up for the love of us. But also let us ask Him to pardon all the displeasure we may have caused Him in

our childhood and youth. Alas ! how great is the difference between Jesus and ourselves ! What were our earliest thoughts, and desires, and acts ? " So little," says St. Augustine of himself, " and yet such a sinner!" Does not our conscience say the same thing ? How many of our inclinations were counter to the grace of our Baptism ! And what has become of that very grace ? How many are our bitter memories ! What a strange history is ours ! The first absolution wiped out everything, but what then ? What sort of piety, humility, charity, and obedience were ours ? When we were fourteen or eighteen ?

O Jesus ! by the infinite merits Thou didst acquire at that age, in which I did nothing but offend, by the merits of so many days and nights and hours and minutes all sanctified by Thy wonderful worship of Thy Father, and by Thy perfect charity and humility, by the holy succession of moments, each one of which was worth a whole eternity in the sight of the Father, grant me the inestimable grace " to walk circumspectly : not as the unwise, but as wise : redeeming the time, because the days (of my past life) were evil." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 15.—See Cornelius à Lapide on this text, and on Col. iv. 5.

But contrition, gratitude, praise, admiration, are not the only feelings aroused within us by contemplating the years of the Childhood and Youth of Jesus. Such contemplation should also inspire us with a great love for all that makes for the sanctification of children and the young, so that they too, like our divine Example, may advance in grace and wisdom, as well as in age. How many good works are proposed for our piety and zeal ! There are the orphanages, the guilds for the young, boys' brigades, and working men's clubs. Did not Jesus grow up in a workshop ? And, above all, there are our various seminaries. The love of priestly souls in the young should be one of the characteristic features of the piety of our times, so great are the needs of the Holy Church to-day ! If we only love the child, the youth, the working man, because Jesus was an artisan, how can we help loving priestly souls for His sake, since He was a Priest, the one Pattern of all souls called to the priesthood ? We should pray much for them, helping them by our counsel and example, if such acts of charity belong to our position, and support them in their vocation by our alms, if it be in our power to do so.

Let it be our wish for these above all, that

they may grow up to be “perfect men, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

### III

#### “Jesus advanced in Grace”

We have already remarked that Jesus could not advance in interior perfection, and hence He could not advance in inward grace; for in our Lord, Wisdom, Grace, Perfection, are synonymous terms.

Since, however, after saying that “Jesus advanced in wisdom” the Evangelist adds that He advanced “in grace,” we must not fail to dwell on the latter expression. But in order to avoid repeating what has already been said, we will now take the interpretation of St. Cyril of Alexandria and of St. John Damascene as the subject of our present meditation.

The former says that the Holy Child, always manifesting before the eyes of men the grace which was in Him, “increased not in Himself, but in the esteem and love of those who witnessed His virtues.”<sup>2</sup>

The latter observes: “Jesus Christ advances

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. X, *Thesauri*, cap. vii. *Detegendo se ipsum in dies, non ipse, sed qui mirabantur ipsum atque amabant, proficiebant.*

in wisdom and in grace, not in Himself, but in Christians, who are his members.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus our divine Lord grows in us in two ways: (1) by our knowledge of Him, and (2) by the increase of His grace in us. Let us now consider these two points.

1. Jesus increases in us by the knowledge we have of Him.

In the Christian whose faith is weak, the knowledge of our Lord is like a light in danger of going out, which only glimmers, and, as St. Peter says, “shineth in a dark place.”<sup>2</sup> But this dim light ought constantly to increase in this life; for the only real and indispensable knowledge is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And this is why the Apostles were never weary of reminding the first Christians of it, recommending them on all occasions “to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> O happy growth! O most desirable increase of intelligence! “Who does not progress in this fashion,” says St. Leo, “will only fall away, and who acquires not this knowledge of a truth loses much.”<sup>4</sup> Cor-

<sup>1</sup> Lib. III, *De Fide*, cap. xxii. *Christus proficit gratia et sapientia non in se, sed in membris suis, Christianis.*

<sup>2</sup> 2 Pet. i. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Col. i. 10; 2 Pet. iii. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Serm. VIII de Passione.*

nelius à Lapide explains the passage of St. Peter above quoted as follows :

“To grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is to grow in the knowledge of His Divinity, of His Humanity, of His Redemption, of His Resurrection, of His Grace, of His Glory, and of all His mysteries and blessings. Of a truth, a Christian should not spend a single day without making fresh progress in the knowledge and contemplation and love of Jesus Christ ; for thus will he himself grow in merits, enriching his crown and increasing his heavenly glory.”

Let us not be slack in this important and comforting duty ; and since Jesus wills to grow in us by a fuller manifestation of what He is, of His lovelinesses and graces, of the spirit underlying His mysteries, let us open our souls to this light, and let it grow in us unto “a perfect day,”<sup>1</sup> to use the words of Holy Scripture.

And for this purpose, let us make use of three chief means :

(1) Let us learn to have a great love of hearing the word of God, which speaks to us directly or indirectly of our Lord, or of His grace, or of His will with regard to ourselves,

<sup>1</sup> Prov. iv. 18.

(2) Let us be diligent in the reading of spiritual books, especially of such as treat of the Life and mysteries of our dear Redeemer.

(3) Finally, let us make what we have heard or read bear fruit by serious meditation, especially in visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Habitual mental prayer is what really fulfils and completes what we have learnt to know of our Lord Jesus Christ by preaching or spiritual reading.

Thus it is true that our Lord increases within us by the knowledge we gain of Him, but there is another growth of Jesus within us, which is far more to be desired. It is His growth in grace in our souls.

2. Jesus increases in us by the communication of His grace to our souls, and by its diffusion in them.

When the divine Word took upon Himself our human nature in Mary's womb, He gave by the union of the human with the divine sanctifying grace to human nature. But what was this sanctifying grace? It was all the holiness in its fulness which the Blessed Trinity, its source, willed to communicate to all those who were to receive the fruits of the Redemption. This fulness filled, if we may

use such an expression, the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, making it as it were an immense ocean of grace. This divine ocean has never lost all its riches ; nor did it ever acquire anything additional, so much did it abound to the utmost in all grace. But when we are baptized, we who are like empty dry cisterns have this flood poured out upon us ; and this outpouring of the divine ocean is the sanctifying grace shed upon us. Hence, in all truth, as St. Augustine teaches, the same grace which at first sanctified the Man-God is the grace that always sanctifies the baptized.<sup>1</sup>

We are not sufficiently acquainted with this wonderful truth, which should fill us in our time of exile with so much comfort and hope.

The divine ocean is poured out upon all Christians, and it ever exists in all its fulness ; but it is not thus with our souls ; they may lose the grace they have received, and there is nothing so deplorable as the state of those who have lost what is really a beginning of heavenly glory.

But it may also be acquired afresh, and it may increase in us indefinitely. For the ocean,

<sup>1</sup> *Ea gratia fit ab initio fidei suæ homo quicumque Christianus, qua gratia Homo ille ab initio suo factus est Christus.* S. Aug., *de Prædest. Sanct.* I, xv. 31.

which is the fulness of Christ, does not cease to be poured out upon us ; and after having given us sanctifying grace, it constantly imparts to us actual grace.

Now grace is the life of Jesus Christ within us, living in the child and in the youth, and in all those who abide in His friendship. But in the child, He is still small ; and thus He remains without increase in those who do not rightly esteem His grace, and who are not eager for it to expand within them. But it increases constantly in faithful souls who allow Jesus to live and to rule in them. How does He then “advance in grace,” how does His life dilate within them ! How gladly does He attain the end for which He became incarnate ! For He came only to give us this life, and to give it us in ever increasing abundance.<sup>1</sup>

Oh, advance, dear Jesus ! expand within me, take possession of me ! The more Thou reignest within me, the more free and happy shall I be. There is no life but Thy life. When shall I be nothing, and when wilt Thou be all ? When shall I be able to say with St. Paul : “ For me to live is Christ ” ? and again : “ Jesus Christ is all in all ” ? O holy Child and Youth of Nazareth ! O my God, my only God ! in Thy

<sup>1</sup> John x. 10.

darkness and Thy toil and Thy poverty, I adore Thee and declare that Thou art my Sovereign and my Lord. Exercise Thy power; rule and govern and inspire all within me. If I resist, lovingly destroy all hindrances ; I yield myself up, I love Thy sway, do with me as Thou wilt. In my mind and heart and life, and in my whole being, be Thou all !

## XXVI

### MARY'S LIFE DURING THE HOLY CHILDHOOD AND THE HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS

#### I

##### *Mary's Devotion to the Contemplation of Jesus*

WHAT could Mary's life at Bethlehem, in Egypt, and at Nazareth have been but the constant occupation of her mind and heart with the Holy Child and Youth who was her all? Here we are face to face with a mystery of wondrous beauty: Mary contemplating, meditating upon, and studying Jesus! One would suppose that the Evangelist himself was taken up with the contemplation of this wonderful mystery, since he refers to it twice in the same chapter, and uses the same expressions about it. He says, after telling the story of the birth of the Holy Child and of the first visit of the Shepherds: "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." And he says the same thing after telling of

the return of the Holy Family to Nazareth, and of the obedience of Jesus. Hence we see that Mary was inwardly wholly given up to the contemplation and the study of her divine Son.

O Mary ! O sweet Mother ! grant us thy children the grace to understand in some degree this wondrous mystery of love !

1. Mary dwelt in mind unceasingly upon Jesus. She never let Him pass out of the sight of her eyes, nor did she fail to note anything in her heart. It was an irresistible need of her soul, which was so bound up with Jesus. We saw how great was her grief and martyrdom, when the Holy Child hid Himself for three days, and when she lost His visible presence at Jerusalem. But when this sorrowful mystery was over, and when the grace it was meant to work in Mary was accomplished, she had to endure this trial no longer. Henceforward, she does not lose Jesus. This seems to be shown by the words of St. Luke : “ And He went down with them to Nazareth, and was subject to them.”

Thus, apart from this fearful mystery, Mary ever had Jesus before her eyes, the eyes of her heart, and nothing escaped her notice. The least details of the divine life of her Child

constantly occupied her thoughts, and this engrossment becomes a sort of unceasing ecstasy. What is exceptional in the lives of the Saints was habitual in this Blessed Mother : her ecstasy never ended. But, in the case of the Saints, ecstasy works strange effects : it does not allow them to busy themselves with the ordinary matters of life, and it deprives them of external sensation. In Mary, on the other hand, on account of the wonderful strength of the graces vouchsafed her, all was in admirable harmony. She was able to attend carefully to the duties of family life while in the highest ecstasy.

And how could it have been otherwise ? Duty, which is the will of God, called her constantly to attend to a thousand petty details of common life, and the ineffably beautiful subject of her meditations, ever before her eyes, set her mind and heart in rapture, as it were, naturally.

O Mary ! we are nothing but ignorance, and our poor minds cleave to the ground, and still we cannot conceive of thy life otherwise than as a perpetual rapture, but how are we to learn what thy mind saw in thy state of rapture ? Jesus prayed. But what beauty didst thou contemplate in the prayers of Jesus ? Or He

rested in His toil, or took a meal, or had to confer with others about His work. Jesus then had to answer or ask some question, and referred to thee, O Mother ! Jesus was sad, or it may be joyful. He showed some outward sign of His divine felicity. O ineffable mystery ! O incomprehensible ecstasy ! O transports of Mary's heart ! O wonderfully sanctifying influence ! Of a truth, when the almighty Word of the Father created the whole world out of nothing, it wrought not anything to rival the wonder operated in Mary's soul by contemplating one of the least of Jesus' acts, a single tone of His voice, or the spectacle of one of His tears !

Thus Mary came to know Jesus in a way which was singularly her own. What the widest sweep of theology in its highest development was to embrace of the Word incarnate is but as a shadow compared with the incomparable knowledge of the Mother of God. She contemplated Jesus, and her pondering bore wondrous fruit. In her was no impediment, but all was a help to such knowledge, which the Apostle calls "surpassing all,"<sup>1</sup> when he considers its "breadth, and length, and height, and depth."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii. 18 and 19.

<sup>2</sup> John xvii. 3.

Cornelius à Lapide, commenting on the two passages in the second chapter of St. Luke, says of Mary's contemplation that what she learnt thus to know she afterwards communicated to the Apostles and the new-born Church.

May this good Mother deign to teach us too, and to impart to us this knowledge which is the joy of those who possess it in heaven.<sup>1</sup> Let us despise all other kinds of knowledge in comparison with this ! In the words of St. Paul, who says he knew nothing but Jesus Christ : "Let us count all things to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord : for whom St. Paul suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but as dung, that he might gain Christ."<sup>2</sup>

2. There is one special lesson to be drawn from the words : "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." They reveal to us the habitual occupation of the Blessed Virgin, that is to say, meditating and contemplating Jesus, His states, mysteries, and dispositions.

Nowadays we attach so much importance to external works that contemplation is no longer

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 8.

prized at its true value. But here we find a justification of this holy exercise, and of the life of which it forms the chief element. Later on, our Lord says to the contemplative Mary Magdalene : "She hath chosen the best part."<sup>1</sup>

The life of Mary at Nazareth, and the life of Jesus Himself, are a splendid commentary on this passage.<sup>2</sup>

The contemplative life, the life of solitude and silence, the life of the cloister, is not in any way an extraordinary thing. What is a strange thing is our astonishment at such a life, or our ignorance of it. If we knew something of the beauty of God and of the love of Him whom God sent into the world for our salvation, and who ever abides in the Blessed Sacrament for the love of us ; if the mysteries of Bethlehem and Nazareth appeared to us in their true colours ; if we were familiar with the sayings of the Word during His public life on earth ; if the Passion in all its unfathomable deeps of grief and love were revealed to us ; if the ineffable mystery of the Host in our Tabernacles were less impenetrable to our

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 42.

<sup>2</sup> See Bossuet, *Elévation sur les Mystères*, XX, 9, *La vie de Marie*.

souls so heavy with indifference and sensuality ; if with a more living faith we could only lift the veil which shrouds all divine wonders ; then we should surely not only appreciate the contemplative life of solitude and silence, but we should not be able to force ourselves to be satisfied with the excitements of the world, or even with the joys of family life.

Let us now resolve to give a larger place in our lives to meditation upon the mysteries of Jesus ; and may our dear Lord grant us to rise to the serene and sweet joy of contemplating His beauty and His love !

## II

### *Mary is all inflamed and consumed with the Love of Jesus*

St. Luke says : “ Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” Note especially the words : *in her heart*. Mental prayer and contemplation begin with the mind ; but they end in the heart, and it is the affections of the heart—that is to say, acts of love and of the will—which really make prayer and contemplation bear fruit. To know with-

out loving would be a great misfortune; unfortunately, in the lost it will be the most intolerable torment of eternity.<sup>1</sup> But, O Jesus! how can we know Thee here on earth without loving Thee? how can we catch a glimpse of Thy amiableness, and not burn with love for Thee? Mary did more than catch a glimpse of Thine unutterable beauty in the clear brightness of Thy light, she sounded the depths of grace that belong to none but Thee, and thus loved with a love possessed by no other. To describe her soul as entirely a furnace of love is all our stammering tongues can utter of our meaning, conveying but dimly what we fain would say. Mary loved Jesus on every possible ground, in all the ways known to mystical theology.

1. Mary loved Jesus on every possible ground. In Him she saw and loved her Redeemer, her Father, her Lord, her Spouse, her Son.<sup>2</sup> In Him she saw and loved her God, her sole centre, her first beginning, her last end. He had created her out of nothing. He

<sup>1</sup> James ii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Dominus Jesus erat Mariæ Filius et Sponsus, Pater et Mater, et omne bonum.* S. Bonav., *Medit. Vitæ Christi*, c. lxxxiii.

was the goal of her entire existence, in Him she was “to live and move, and be.”<sup>1</sup> He whom she beheld was the Eternal, the Infinite, the Almighty! How must her heart have burnt within her at this perpetual vision!

In the Holy Child of Bethlehem, the pure Youth of Nazareth, she saw her sole and most generous Benefactor. She knew that she owed Him all her privileges and glories; her Immaculate Conception and all its astounding graces and prerogatives; her divine maternity and perpetual virginity; and lastly, her special union with Him as Mediator, Redeemer, Sacrifice. None ever was or would be as favoured as she was by the Word incarnate, and Mary knew this! What fresh flames of love must this knowledge have awakened in her heart with all its humility and consequent gratitude!

In Jesus Mary saw her Redeemer, her own Saviour, for it is true that all the graces she received had their origin in the Redemption wrought by her Holy Child. His present and His future sufferings were all mainly accepted and endured for Mary’s sake, not to expiate her sin in the same way as ours, but to preserve her from all evil and to enrich her with all good. And this Mary knew! How high

<sup>1</sup> *Acts xvii. 28.*

must the fire of love have flamed up in her heart !

In Jesus Mary saw her own Father who had engendered her in reality to the divine life, her Teacher and Master who taught her all truth and guided her in the way of salvation, her Spouse who raised her to the most wonderful union with God, and, indeed, her All in the order of grace : her Friend, her Counsellor, her Protector, her Comforter, her Strength, her Hope, her Joy, and her sole Life. And in proportion as Mary pondered all this in her heart, the fire of love within her spread and rose ever more and more.

But there was a peculiar tie of love between Jesus and Mary. We can only mention it : Jesus was her Son, the fruit of her virgin womb. None could ever tell all this name meant to the Virgin Mother. Shall we ever know, even in heaven, all the ardour that burned in her heart at the mere thought : "He is my Son," or at the word of Jesus, saying : "Thou art My Mother?" O mystery of a love unequalled ! O living and ardent flames ! O ever-increasing fire ! O Mary ! thou wonder of rapture and of love ! Thou wast nothing but love !

O Jesus ! how I thank and praise Thee !

Let me venture also to congratulate Thee on having such a Mother !

2. And if we would go on to tell of all the marks of the love of Mary for Jesus, we should have to exhaust all the terms used in mystical theology to express the different operations of love, and apply to the Angels to give us fresh ones. What a lovely thing is this ! If it presents great difficulties, it also affords great and most sweet joys. Let us, then, remark that Mary's love was wonderfully distinguished by five main characteristics, which are pointed out by the holy Doctors : it was a love of sovereign *preference*, of perfect *union in joy*, of most affectionate *good-will*, of most sorrowful *condolence*, and of most absolute *conformity*.

(1) It was of sovereign *preference*.—To Mary, what was all the magnificence or the wealth of the whole world, including the angelic world, compared with her Jesus ? He was far higher than all else. She esteemed and loved Him as the sole Good, and she fulfilled with regard to Him in a far more absolute manner than any other creature could do the great commandment : “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul,

and with thy whole strength." In her great esteem and love she would have liked to take all creatures visible and invisible and to offer them as a holocaust to her divine Son, although He seemed outwardly so lowly, and therefore all the more beloved.—She would have liked herself to be a perpetual and entire holocaust unto Him, and in this she completely succeeded. Her whole soul was a holocaust, and Jesus has never been so worshipped.

(2) It was of perfect *union in joy*.—When such love as this takes possession of a soul, all its joy and satisfaction and pleasure lie in the thought of God and His perfections, and of the excellence of His works, and of His essential glory, and of the glory He receives from His creatures. In this thought it finds its peace and delight, and its whole life ; and because of it, all the troubles of this life seem as nothing. Now, thus Mary loved Jesus to such an extent that all we read of the loving joy of the Saints in God must be counted as nothing compared with hers.

(3) It was of most affectionate *good-will*.—Such love fills the soul with an ardent desire, an insatiable hunger and thirst for making its beloved known and served by all, so that his glory may shine forth in them owing to their

perfect docility to the dictates of love. But all the zeal of the Apostles, and all the holy ardours of the contemplative will never rival or approach the benevolence of the love of the Blessed Virgin for Jesus.

(4) It was of most sorrowful *condolence*.—The more highly a soul esteems the love due to God and rejoices in the possession of it, the more does it grieve over the offences against Him and His love committed by creatures. Alas ! how such pain increasingly afflicted the heart of Mary amidst the mysteries of the holy Childhood, in which we meet with so much indifference and even hatred shown towards her adorable Babe.

(5) It was of most absolute *conformity*.—It was in absolute harmony with the good pleasure of the beloved. In fact, the whole of Mary's life consisted of self-abandonment to the grace and guidance of Jesus. He was in the fullest sense of the word the absolute "Master" of her life ; and the docility of Mary is a mystery of unfathomable depth.

Such is the little we are now able to say upon the marks of Mary's love for Jesus.

O Mary ! thou abyss of divine wonders !  
What a distance there is between thee and us !

And nevertheless, we are thy children ! When shall we catch some sparks of the fire of love in thy heart ?

## III

*Mary is a faithful Copy of Jesus*

Love effects likeness. Mary was a faithful and exact likeness of Jesus.

1. We may well say that, as in most cases, Jesus the Son of Mary *physically* resembled His Mother. He had the same pure and regular features, the same virginal and heavenly expression. He probably looked the same way, and had similar tones of voice, using some of her modes of speech, all the little things which taken together make the son like his mother. Thus it must have been with Jesus. But, if He was outwardly like Mary, it is far more true to say that inwardly and spiritually Mary was wonderfully like Jesus. For if she had borne Him in her virgin womb, it is no less sure that, in the order of grace, Jesus was the Father and Mother of Mary, as St. Bonaventure says ; and in this twofold character He mysteriously engendered her, imparting to her an ever-increasing likeness to His own divine features. For it is written that our whole pre-

destination and salvation consist in such a spiritual conformity with the likeness of Jesus, as St. Paul writes : " For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son."<sup>1</sup>

And the same St. Paul tells us that we must be such perfect counterparts of Jesus Christ as to have His mind in us,<sup>2</sup> and that His mind must appear in all our acts, so that the life of Jesus Christ may be seen outwardly in us.<sup>3</sup>

But such was our Mother to an extent beyond all our conceptions.

The religion of Jesus was hers ; the patience, the humility, the mortification, the charity of Jesus adorned the soul of Mary, and decked her interior life. And because Jesus prayed, worked, and endured suffering, and because He wrought all His works incessantly as a Victim of the Father, Mary always entered into the same spirit and into the same way ; and whether she prayed, or was busied with works of charity, or merely performed the lowly duties of home life, each of her acts being in union with Jesus was a sacrifice of sweetest savour to the Almighty. What a

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 11 ; cf. Rom. xiii. 14 ; Phil. i. 20. See Cornelius à Lapide on these texts.

spectacle for Angels, and what a subject for the good pleasure of the Father Himself were the combined flames of these two Holocausts, burning in a single Sacrifice unceasingly before the divine Majesty to the praise and glory of God, to implore His blessings upon all His creatures, and to appease His just indignation against sinners and against all of us !

2. Thus passed the unnoticed but mysterious years at Nazareth in calm peace and charity, continually spent in the holy exercise of the life of sacrificial Victims. Elsewhere seemingly great and glorious events were taking place. Rome, the capital of the civilized world, continued to extend her victorious dominion over the earth ; she founded new colonies, built wealthy cities, reigning everywhere triumphant and supreme. During the thirty years of the hidden life of Jesus two Emperors succeeded to the throne ; and despite their vices and cruelty, they were clothed with power and honour. Men of genius abounded, and the brilliancy of their eloquence and bravery shone upon the empire of the eternal city ! On all sides naught but triumph and magnificence and pleasure filled the mouths of men.

Alas ! what was all this compared with the

unknown life of Jesus and Mary and Joseph at Nazareth ! Throughout the vast Roman Empire there was naught but vanity and lies, perversity and scandals, nothing for God, for the soul, and for eternity. At Nazareth, on the contrary, were light, and grace, and the kingdom of God, all the splendours of heaven brought down to earth, the most perfect worship, the purest love, aspirations ascending to God, and corresponding to all that He is in Himself. O Nazareth, true kingdom of God and centre of the universe ! In appearance, thou seemest to be naught : in reality, the world it is that is nothing in spite of all its magnificence ; in thee alone are peace and truth, and all true glory !

Jesus it is, Jesus Priest and Victim, Jesus the Source and Centre of all the worship due to God and of all the salvation poured forth upon mankind, Jesus it is who is the cause of this ineffable wonder ; but the union of Mary with Jesus, of Mary most lovingly linking Joseph with herself in that union, and representing us all to God made man, her own Son ; the union of this Blessed Virgin with the God of all loveliness and charity was really the consummation of the heavenly wonder. Mary studied Jesus, and her study of Him bore fruit ;

she loved Jesus, and her heart burned with her immense love of Him ; she imitated Jesus, and became a most faithful likeness of her Son. Now, all lies herein ; all truth, all peace, all holiness, all life.

For such an occupation as this, the years at Nazareth were not too many ; they were all too few. For such an occupation as this, our life also would be all too short ; but we have eternity before us.

We have all eternity wherein to learn to know and love Jesus better ; but eternity is not granted us for learning the better to imitate Him. *Here* we have to learn this great lesson, except so far as the flames of Purgatory may perfect what is wanting in our likeness at the hour of death. Let us not, however, wait for this painful work of perfection. Let us now use every day and hour in diligently "forming Christ within us,"<sup>1</sup> in learning to "bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the image of the earthly."<sup>2</sup> For thus, "if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death (and of His life), we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 19.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. vi. 5.

## XXVII

### THE UNION OF ST. JOSEPH WITH OUR LORD IN THE MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY CHILDHOOD AND OF THE HIDDEN LIFE—AND HIS HOLY DEATH

#### I

##### *St. Joseph's Union with our Lord in ministering to Him*

ST. JOSEPH fulfilled a wonderful ministry towards Jesus in His childhood and youth. Let us now meditate on his service, which was a part of the divine plan of the Most Holy Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

First of all, we may note a kind of figure of it in the Old Testament. This is a specially moving consideration, because it shows us how the ministry of St. Joseph was connected with the Holy Child of Nazareth in His condition as a Victim. Afterwards we shall proceed to

<sup>1</sup> *Matri et Filio necessarius Joseph : Matri ut ab infamia  
defenderet, Filio ut educaret.* St. Thomas in Matt. i. 20.

consider how St. Joseph fulfilled towards Jesus the duties of a Father, Protector, and Guide, which God had laid upon him.

1. St. Joseph's ministry to our dear Victim, the Holy Child of Nazareth, had been foretold in a way in the Old Testament. We refer to what God prescribed with regard to the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb. This will be found in the twelfth chapter of the book of Exodus.

On the tenth day of the month Nisan, the month of the Passover, each family had to procure a lamb. This lamb was to be a yearling, and without spot. But the sacrifice was only to take place on the fourteenth day of the month, so that from four to five days the lamb was entrusted to the care of the head of the household, who was afterwards to sacrifice it. He fed and protected it, and took care that the victim should not be wanting at the time of the sacrifice.

But nothing is more touching than the application of this Judaic rite to the Child Jesus, and to him who was called by men and by the Holy Ghost Himself the father of Jesus.

Certain it is that the lamb thus chosen on the tenth day, and slain on the fourteenth, expressly prefigured our Lord Jesus Christ, the

*spotless Lamb*, as He is called by St. Peter, or *the Lamb of God*, as He is called by St. John. It prefigured Him by its innocence, by its sacrifice; and even the noteworthy interval between the slaying and the first setting apart of the Paschal lamb was reproduced by our adorable Victim, offered at the outset of His mortal life, and slain thirty years later on the altar of the Cross.

But this interval is marked by the supervision and protection of the father of the family; for though there is no mention of his care in the book of Exodus, it is so natural that it cannot be questioned, since the victim must necessarily be a subject of the solicitude of the priest. But in the Paschal sacrifice, the father of the family was the priest, whatever his tribe might be.

Thus, this vigilant father, who watches over the lamb and protects it from all accidents to keep it for the sacrifice, is a very expressive figure of St. Joseph, as was the lamb of Jesus Himself.—It was not necessary for the father of the family under the Old Law to belong to the priestly tribe of Aaron in order to fulfil the duties of a priest required by the circumstances; it was enough for him to be filled with the sacrificial spirit, which alone honours God.

In the same way, St. Joseph was no priest, since he was of the tribe of Juda, not of that of Levi ; but he possessed the priestly spirit in a pre-eminent way, and this is why our adorable Victim was entrusted to his care by God during the whole of His life in the concealment of Nazareth, and he watched over his charge with fatherly protection, keeping the Victim for the great day of His Sacrifice.—Let us call to mind here how he discharged these duties.

2. Although St. Joseph was only the foster father of Jesus, he always acted as a true father, with all a father's love and devotion.<sup>1</sup> He lived only for Jesus : was he not aware of his lowly Child's place in the order of heaven and of earth ? He saw in Him the Victim of the Father, the Saviour of the world, the eternal Joy of the Blessed ; and there was no trouble or toil or sacrifice he was not ready to undertake for the sake of Him whose destiny was so great.

We have already considered the dark night in which the Angel came to bid him fly in haste

<sup>1</sup> *Ministerium et officium Josephi fuit nobilissimum. . . . Christum aluit, forit, custodivit, ac eum in arte fabrili secum exercenda direxit, ut habeat communis Doctorum sententia.—Cornelius à Lapide in Matt. i. 16.*

into Egypt. This Gospel episode shows us the heart of this wonderful father. In these circumstances, he saved the divine Victim from the fury of a wicked and cruel king, and thus kept Him for the sacrifice on Calvary.

In Egypt, when the Holy Child was no longer nourished on His Mother's milk, it was St. Joseph who maintained Him with the fruits of his labours. And he it was who, along with Mary, clothed Him, as the Church reminds us in a prayer which she has indulged for priests.<sup>1</sup>

Along with Mary, too, He watched over His first steps, and protected Him from any harmful accident; for Jesus, who is Omnipotence itself, willed to be subject as an ordinary child to all the infirmities of our fallen nature. St. Joseph so watched over Him at every turn that the Church does not shrink from calling him a "*minister of safety*"<sup>2</sup> to Jesus.

On the return from Egypt he was the Holy Infant's guide.<sup>3</sup> And when our dear Victim, in the words of the prophet, had to be "in labours from His youth,"<sup>4</sup> and had to handle

<sup>1</sup> *O felicem virum cui datum est Jesum . . . non solum videre . . . sed vestire.*

<sup>2</sup> *Dedit et ministrum esse salutis.* Hymn. Matutin. in festo S. Joseph.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. ii. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. lxxxvii. 16.

the saw and the plane, he was His teacher. To Him who is omniscient he gave lessons in the trade of a carpenter, as He was called during His public life. "Is not this the carpenter?"<sup>1</sup>

We say that St. Joseph was His instructor, and yet Jesus knew all. But He willed to learn everything still better by way of obedience; and thus the word of St. Luke—"He was subject to them"—is once more justified.

O good Father St. Joseph! O true Guardian of the Holy Lamb! O most devoted Protector of our sweet Victim! O thou who didst watch over and feed Him, rear Him, and in a manner train Him unto sacrifice! Blessed be thou! For His labours, the sweat of His brow, the wood He carries on His shoulders, all His toil in thy workshop under thy orders and oversight, are but a prelude to Calvary. Blessed be thou for the unspeakable services thou hast rendered to our souls by thus preserving their Redeemer and their Victim! If one of the greatest theologians of the Church<sup>2</sup> tells us that thy ministry surpassed in excellence even that of the Apostles,

<sup>1</sup> Mark vi. 3; Matt. xiii. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Suarez in III Part. S. Thomæ, q. xxix, disp. 8, § 1.

this special excellence has its origin in the fact that thou hast helped in such a touching manner in the fulfilment of the mission for the sake of which Jesus came into the world, to glorify God and save souls by being a Victim and a Sacrifice. And for all this we bless thee, O true Father and Saviour of our souls !

## II

*St. Joseph's interior Union with our Lord*

The soul of Jesus is the unique and incomparable masterpiece of divine grace. The soul of Mary, reflecting all its merits, is a perfect likeness of it. The pure soul of Joseph holds the third place in excellence and perfection. Doubtless, one ought not to discuss the personal merits of the Saints ; the author of the *Imitation of Christ* tells us not to do so. But when we speak of St. Joseph, we find no difference of opinion amongst the Fathers and Doctors : and this is easily understood. All agree that St. Joseph received graces pre-eminently fitted for the fulfilment of his duties towards the Holy Child,<sup>1</sup> and, on the other hand, because he was the spouse of the

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas in *Ep. ad Rom.* viii. 5. — See also St. Bernardine of Siena, *Serm. I, de S. Joseph* (Rom. Brev. *Patroc. S. Joseph, Noct. ii*).

Mother of God, he had been made like (not equal to, but like) the Blessed Virgin in holiness,<sup>1</sup> since it was only right that their alliance should be without any defect. But the same Fathers and Doctors unanimously declare that St. Joseph was always heroically and sublimely faithful to the grace he had received, whether as the father of Jesus, or as the bridegroom of Mary. And consequently, he naturally and rightly comes next to Jesus and Mary, and his heavenly soul is what most resembles the soul of Jesus and the soul of Mary.

Now let us briefly consider the holy soul of the Patriarch St. Joseph.

All grace that could be given to men was in Jesus, and since all the grace in Jesus is that of being a sacrificial victim, to receive grace and to be faithful to it is simply to live in the closest union with Jesus the Victim. But this union is St. Joseph's greatest glory. His glory is not precisely due to the fact of the pre-eminent ministry he fulfilled, but to the union into which he entered and which he daily made more intimate with Him to whom he ministered. This marvellous union transformed him into a most perfect victim.

<sup>1</sup> *Erat B. Josephus factus in similitudinem Virginis Sponsæ sua.* S. Pet. Damian.

Three virtues specially distinguish his union with Jesus, and therefore his life as a sacrificial victim: Humility, Purity, and Charity. These are the three great virtues of St. Joseph.

1. *Humility*.—Humility well befits one who is a victim, because he ever contemplates Him who is infinite, and thinks, being but a poor nonentity, that he is fit for nothing but nothingness. But who can tell what was the humility of this man who was so remarkable for the honour that was conferred upon him, and yet took pleasure in naught but obscurity and silence; who always effaced himself and desired only to be unnoticed; who is only spoken of in the Scriptures to tell of his obedience, or of his anxiety when he was troubled as to the holy mystery wrought in Mary, an anxiety which, according to St. Jerome, was only the outcome of his sense of his own unworthiness?

One cannot think of St. Joseph without recollecting the expression of those who are most modest and thoughtful, and without having in mind an entirely spiritual life, altogether lost in God. There is no disturbance, no making of a scene; but retirement, great

diligence in keeping in the background, in attempting to remain unnoticed in his own days, and also in the time that followed. (Yet St. Joseph could not have thought of concealing himself from posterity, for he never could have had an idea that posterity would care about him.) What a life! What a wonderful spectacle for Angels and for Jesus Himself, and for Mary! What wonders shall we have to contemplate in heaven! And yet, when once in heaven, we shall find that the humility of St. Joseph is one of our sweetest and most joyous subjects of admiration.

2. *Purity.* — He who is a victim in the presence of an all-holy God must be of the greatest purity, lest he should be rejected by God, in whose sight even the Angels are not without spot. But Joseph was a victim of absolutely perfect purity, a purity more than angelic, a purity worthy of Mary, and worthy of Jesus. St. Ambrose, explaining the trouble that the Blessed Virgin felt in the mystery of the Annunciation, says that it was the sight of the Angel Gabriel appearing to her in the form of a man that brought it about; but no author says that the sight of St. Joseph, or even her habitual companionship with the holy man,

ever troubled her.<sup>1</sup> St. Joseph's purity is another of heaven's secrets.

Here we give a translation of the prayer which was first of all indulged for priests, and now for all the faithful, so that readers may use it at any rate in the present meditation.

“Guardian of virgins, and holy father Joseph, to whose faithful custody Christ Jesus, Innocence itself, and Mary, Virgin of virgins, were committed ; I pray and beseech thee, by these dear pledges, Jesus and Mary, that, being preserved from all uncleanness, I may with spotless mind, pure heart and chaste body, ever serve Jesus and Mary most chastely all the days of my life. Amen.”

3. *Charity*.—This is the fire in which the victim is consumed : charity towards God and charity towards men's souls. The love of St. Joseph for God, for His glory and interests, his zeal for the hallowing of the divine name, his spirit of self-sacrifice for the fulfilment of God's good pleasure, the perpetual offering of himself for the honour and protection of Jesus,

<sup>1</sup> St. Peter Damian says that the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is the belief of the Church: *fides ecclesiae*. Ep. xi.

the ardent fire with which he was consumed for the love of the Holy Child, His God and Saviour, who condescended to entrust Himself to him and to call him His father, all his inner life of boundless charity, all his outward life of toil and weariness and poverty and suffering, all this and all that we cannot even conceive, made Joseph in the sight of God a sacrifice of such a sweet savour that the high perfection of his life surpassed that of any Saint in the Old Testament.

For the love of God so far embraces the love of our neighbour that it is not really charity unless it comprises the latter kind of love. And this tells us how great must have been the zeal of our lowly Patron and Father, who was so fond of contemplation and of silence, for the salvation of souls. He read the heart of Jesus ; he knew why that sweet Child had come into the world, and why He was leading a life of such poverty, concealment, lowness, labour, and suffering. He entered unimpeded into the secret of the Sacred Heart, and there He contemplated by anticipation all the pains of the Passion ; he already heard the holy Victim uttering the burning words : "I have a baptism to be baptized with." And St. Joseph, abandoning himself lovingly to the grace of this

mystery of unbounded charity for the souls of men, burned with the same ardour of love. His prayers, his work, his sufferings, were in union with those of Jesus for the redemption of mankind.

And this is why we really have our share, we who are his children, in his prayers and work and suffering, and in his apostolic interior life. Nothing of all this zeal appeared outwardly, just as nothing appeared outwardly in the case of Jesus and of Mary; but the primary and, indeed, the sole source of apostolic zeal is in contemplation,<sup>1</sup> and as it is the source of zeal, it is also the balm that maintains its purity. Finally, it is this that gives zeal its efficacy, for souls are only saved by the grace of God and supernatural charity; and contemplation attracts grace, and preserves the purest ardour of perfect charity in the souls of apostolic men.

What a beautiful lesson is this for those who are busied with the conversion of sinners and with the preservation and perfecting of the just! A wonderful matter for thanksgiving to the lowly and obscure workman of Nazareth,

<sup>1</sup> *Ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur prædicatio.* St. Thomas, ii, II, q. clxxxviii, a. 6.—III, q. xl, a. 1, ad 2.

who prayed that we might receive all the means of sanctification we now enjoy by participating in the sacraments, and by receiving actual grace time after time.

### III

#### *St. Joseph's Death*

The death of the just is the consummation of the perfection of his sacrificial state, because his acceptance of the universal law by which life on earth is brought to an end is the most perfect homage he can pay to Almighty God.

1. Thus it was that St. Joseph understood and loved death. He also loved it because it made him like the adorable Victim whose guardian he was, a Victim who was to consummate His work of redemption by dying on the Cross. And this union with the death of Jesus wonderfully perfected the spirit of being a victim in the holy Patriarch.

Lastly, he loved it with a peculiar affection, if we may venture to use the word in this way, because his death would contribute to the honour and glory of Jesus, and that in the following way.

St. Joseph died (according to the general opinion of the holy Doctors) a year or two

before our Lord's baptism, prior to the time of His public ministry. It was therefore only fit and worthy of the power and prudence<sup>1</sup> of the decrees of the Eternal Wisdom that St. Joseph should no longer be on earth when the Word appeared to men and talked to them openly of His heavenly and eternal Father. The Jews, being carnal and "hard of heart," as St. Stephen called them, would have formed false ideas. The presence of the foster-father of Jesus and the words of our Saviour would have filled the minds of His enemies with such perplexities that they would have brought accusations against Him and His teaching, thus increasing the frequency of their acts of sacrilegious jealousy. But, in the wisdom of God all this was to be avoided, or at any rate stumbling-blocks were to be removed as much as possible from the paths of men's malice ; and therefore it was decreed that lowly St. Joseph should leave the world before Jesus went forth from the sweet and deep obscurity of Nazareth.

Now, St. Joseph, I think, must have been aware of the divine design ; he must have looked forward with loving anticipation to dis-

<sup>1</sup> *In hoc tam magnifico opere suo, nostræ videlicet reparationis, non tantum potentiam suam, sed et prudentiam ostendere voluit.* St. Bernardine, *Homil.*, ii. 13, *super Missus est.*

appearing in order to give His God and Saviour greater freedom in the fulfilment of His appointed mission. Thus, then, does self-sacrifice accompany the last act of the holy Patriarch. He died offering and sacrificing himself lovingly to the glory and good pleasure of the Holy Child, who was, and would be for ever, his All.

O death immensely to be desired ! To die in union with Jesus, in the same dispositions, lovingly embracing the Father's will, this is an immeasurable grace, the grace we look forward to. But to die for Him and for His honour and glory, to extend His kingdom over men's souls, to increase Him by our self-abasement, to be nothing that He may be All : how much more desirable and delightful a death is this ! St. Joseph, Father, true *Martyr* of Jesus Christ, pray for us thy poor children that we may share thy love for Him !

2. And now we may enquire how Joseph prepared to die, how he was comforted and assisted by Jesus and Mary, and lastly, how he was introduced by Jesus Himself into the region known as Limbo, where the just peacefully waited for the coming of the Messias and His ascent into heaven.

(1) St. Joseph's preparation for death was wholly embalmed with the filial, loving, and peaceful spirit of abandonment, which is perhaps one of the most beautiful marks of holiness. He knew God's good pleasure and yielded himself up to it, as a child trustfully gives itself up to its mother's guidance, as simply as the yearling lamb of the Paschal sacrifice, of which we have already spoken. Life in the company of Jesus and Mary, such as he had spent for thirty years, would have been an immense joy to him, had it lasted many years more. And nevertheless, the death that separated him for a time from these two beloved beings, was also a matter of joy to him in another way. In reality, God's good pleasure is also the good pleasure of Jesus, and likewise of Mary. Joseph entered into this spirit, and was as it were absorbed in it, and he rejoiced in the sacrifice, because it united him still more closely in spirit with Jesus and Mary. The wills of all three were bound together in ineffable bliss by God's good pleasure.

(2) The closing scene came after this holy preparation. St. Bernardine of Siena, in a discourse upon St. Joseph, in speaking of his last moments, tells of nothing but "consolations, promises, spiritual illumination, holy kindlings

of the heart, and revelations of eternal blessings.”<sup>1</sup>

The devout Gerson, who is perhaps the most fervent of all the Saint’s panegyrists, goes into further details, in which the purest of natural feelings are revealed. We quote as follows :

“ When the day came, O holy Joseph, which was to lead thee to eternal life, Jesus Christ, thy noble Son, and with Him His ever merciful Mother, comfort thee with the serenity of their looks at the moment of final separation. Their natural love—why need we shrink from admitting it ?—bathes their features in tears. Jesus weeps for His foster-father, and the Virgin for her most chaste Spouse, who is breathing his last. The Virgin bows down over the pillow of her faithful Guardian, and modestly kisses his head and hands : ‘ O my Husband ! ’ she says. ‘ Farewell ! Be of good cheer ! The Lord will find thee a resting-place.’ ”

And then he goes on : “ Joseph then died a beautiful death. Mary put on the mourning of a widow’s garments. The funeral was at

<sup>1</sup> *Quantas consolationes, promissiones, illuminationes, inflammationes, et æternorum bonorum revelationes acceperit in transitu suo a sanctissima Sponsa sua et dulcissimo Filio Dei Jesu !* S. Bernard. Sen. in B. Joseph.

Nazareth ; and all the town lamented the man of peace, who was so good to all, so eminent in perfect holiness, and such a worthy descendant of David.”<sup>1</sup>

(3) But these public honours were as nothing compared with the triumph of Joseph’s holy soul at the moment of its leaving this world. Jesus was his Judge ! And what was the judgement, what the sentence, passed by Jesus ? O divine encounter ! O delightful embrace, a thousandfold sweeter than those which Joseph gave to the Holy Child, and than that Child returned to Joseph ! O praise of God for His faithful servant, the friend so devoted to His glory ! O Bliss of incomparable sweetness ! It was not as yet the beatific Vision, since Jesus had not yet ascended into heaven ; but it was a foretaste of it, and such a foretaste as had been hitherto unknown of any creature not in heaven.

Joseph waited some years in Limbo. There he consoled the Patriarchs and Prophets, and all the just of the Old Testament. What he had to tell of the loveliness of the incarnate Word must have made the remaining years of waiting seem short ; and at last, one day, the gates of this happy region were opened ; Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Gerson, *Josephina*, Distinct. xii.

announced His triumph over sin and death, and then came the deliverance of all this holy throng after the fortieth day. Who can tell the joy of the lowly foster-father of God in that hour of triumph ?

He went up with Him into heaven on the day of the Ascension—the holy Doctors say it was both in body and soul that he rose. And now he reigns for ever and ever with Mary along with the Child of Nazareth !

Let us congratulate our good Father on all the glory he enjoys after so much lowliness. Let us ask him to procure for us the grace to die a death like his, helped in our last hour by Jesus and Mary. Greatly shall we need their pity at our last passing, we who are so poor and fickle in the way of good ! Alas ! we no doubt hope, in spite of our constant and incorrigible perversity, one day to go to heaven where our beloved Father reigns beside Jesus and Mary ; but who of us does not dread the judgement of Him who has so loved us, whom we have served so ill ? O Joseph, gentle Guardian of our souls, obtain for us the grace to prepare better for our dread passing from time to eternity ! And therefore, O Father and merciful Intercessor, secure for us the capital grace of

living like Thee in union with Jesus and Mary !  
Thus shall we lead the much to be desired  
lives of sacrificial victims, humble and obscure,  
seeking nothing here below but the glory of  
God and the fulfilment of His good pleasure.







